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All Roads Lead to Darrington: Building a Bluegrass Community in Western Washington

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All Roads Lead to Darrington: Building a Bluegrass Community in Western Washington

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ABSTRACT

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Through the mid-twentieth century, a significant pattern of migration occurred between Appalachia and the Pacific Northwest, with Washington's thriving timber industry offering compelling economic opportunities. Many workers and families from western North Carolina settled in the small mountain town of Darrington, Washington, frequently accompanied by their banjos and guitars. As a group of young bluegrass enthusiasts from Seattle established relationships with Darrington's "Tar Heel" musicians, a collaborative music community formed, laying the foundation for the region's contemporary bluegrass scene.

Drawn from a series of ethnographic interviews, this project illuminates the development of a bluegrass community in western Washington, while identifying several of its key contributors. The resultant narrative explores the musical legacy of Appalachian migration to the Pacific Northwest, culminating in its convergence with the urban folk music revival of the 1960s. This work contributes to a growing body of scholarship that challenges the traditional geo-cultural assumptions encompassing bluegrass music.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Phil and Vivian Williams, for their enormous contributions to the Northwest music community, and for their generosity in assisting with this project. I hope Phil would be pleased with the result.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has been a long time coming, and I am grateful for the many people who have helped along the way. First and foremost, I would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their stories with me—this project would not be possible without your contributions. Thanks, as well, to my chair, Dr. Lee Bidgood, for his patience, guidance, and encouragement, going back to our first classes together in 2011. To the rest of my committee, and the many dedicated professors I've been privileged to work with in the departments of Appalachian Studies and Art & Design at ETSU—Dr. Rebecca Fletcher, Dr. Ted Olson, Dr. Richard Hood, and Roy Andrade, to name a few. To the many people who welcomed me into the Washington bluegrass community years ago, especially Cliff Perry, Terry Shaw, Doug Chandler, Mark Demaray, and the late Carl Chatski. To my friends and family, most notably my parents, Bill and Mary Edgar, who had good reason to wonder if this would ever get done—here it is. Finally, a special thanks to my brother, David White, for dragging me to my first Darrington Bluegrass Festival back in 2004.

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CHAPTER 1. THE ROAD TO DARRINGTON

The day I drove to Darrington to visit Bertha (Nations) Whiteside was typical of the Pacific Northwest in mid-January: cold, damp, and gray. What began as a light sprinkling of rain around Everett had blossomed into a constant drizzle as I followed State Route 530 out of Arlington. Leaving behind the farmlands and encroaching development of the I-5 corridor, the densely forested Cascade foothills came into view, descending on the North Fork of the Stillaguamish River, and providing a buffer for the jagged peaks beyond, shrouded in their typical layer of fog.

In her classic profile of Darrington, published forty years earlier, Elizabeth Poehlman aptly describes this stretch of highway: “The first trip up the Arlington-Darrington road is a long one. It takes about a year for the journey to shorten to the thirty miles it actually is. For the newcomer the thirty miles are a long trip to nowhere."[1] This must have been especially true for previous generations of migrants who followed this same route, seeking opportunity in the forests and mills of Darrington, while counting off the last few miles of their cross-country journey from North Carolina.

As I pulled onto the winding, single-lane road leading up to Bertha’s, I was struck by the similarity to the hollows of Appalachia. For families migrating from the mountains of western North Carolina, one can imagine the foothills of the Washington Cascades offering some familiarity not found in the streets of Detroit, Dayton, or any of the other industrial centers Appalachian migrants went to in search of work. Dense green forests climbing steep

[1] Elizabeth S. Poehlman, *Darrington: Mining Town/Timber Town* (Shoreline: Gold Hill Press, 1995), 15.

mountainsides—a stark contrast to the harsh, concrete landscape and frenetic pace of life that confronted Appalachian migrants in the urban Midwest.

Situated in a section of Darrington known as Pumpkin Town, a place name echoed in the hills of Jackson County, North Carolina, much of Bertha's extended family resides along the same quiet road that leads to her home at the head of the hollow. Save for the predominance of evergreen trees that give Washington its nickname, and the glacial peaks hiding in the clouds above, the unsuspecting onlooker could mistake their surroundings for the North Carolina mountains from which so many Darrington residents can trace their lineage.

Bertha (Nations) Whiteside is just one of many self-described "Tar Heels" that came to Darrington, and the surrounding area, as part of a focused branch of twentieth century Appalachian migration that diverted from the "Hillbilly Highway," typically aimed toward the industrial Midwest, and moved instead toward the booming timber industry of the Pacific Northwest. While largely overshadowed by the major streams of Appalachian migration to cities like Detroit and Chicago, the movement of people from central and southern Appalachia to the Pacific Northwest warrants a closer look for its lasting impact on the communities involved, not the least of which being the vibrant bluegrass music scene that continues to flourish in Washington State, owing much to the North Carolinians that settled in Darrington decades earlier.

When I set out to explore the connections between Appalachian migration and bluegrass music in Washington State, I knew my first task would involve reaching out to Phil and Vivian Williams. For nearly sixty years, they have worked tirelessly to promote and preserve folk music in the Pacific Northwest, laying the foundation for a vibrant folk music community that continues to thrive in the twenty-first century. From their Voyager Records label, founded in

their home overlooking Lake Washington, to their critical roles in establishing the Seattle Folklore Society and the Northwest Folklife Festival, there isn't a folk or traditional musician within earshot of Seattle that doesn't owe a debt of gratitude to the Williamses.

It shouldn't have been a surprise when my initial email to the Voyager address was answered by Phil later that same night. Not knowing exactly what direction my project would take, I simply expressed an interest in learning more about the early Darrington Tar Heel bluegrass community. Phil and Vivian, fresh out of college, and with a keen interest in bluegrass, were introduced to this community in 1960, quickly becoming fixtures at weekend jam sessions and performing on stage with Tar Heel bands. Demonstrating the great enthusiasm that I have since learned to be characteristic of Phil, he generously replied to my email with a summary of their Darrington experience and vowed to assist with the project going forward. Sadly, at eighty years old, Phil died from complications of blood cancer just a few months later.

Eventually, I began to narrow my focus on the early development of the Darrington bluegrass community, while exploring the ways in which Phil and Vivian's wide-ranging efforts contributed to the sustaining, region-wide bluegrass community that exists in the Pacific Northwest today. In many ways, this project is an opportunity for me to examine my own relationship with the music, while acknowledging some of the important figures whose contributions allowed young, aspiring musicians, like myself, to discover bluegrass music right in our own backyard—far from the Carolina mountains, the bluegrass of Kentucky, or the hills of Tennessee, where I now reside.

Decades after Phil and Vivian, and the Tar Heels before them, I made my first trek up the Arlington-Darrington road, attending the Darrington Bluegrass Festival in 2004. It wasn't until a couple years later that I became aware of the North Carolina connection, and by association, the

work of Phil and Vivian Williams. While making the rounds of Seattle-area music stores and record shops, I wandered into Golden Oldies Records on NE 45th Street. In one of the bins carrying bluegrass records, a weathered beige album jacket caught my eye, featuring a black and white image of two older gentlemen playing banjo and fiddle against a backdrop of evergreen trees. A product of Phil and Vivian's Voyager Recordings, the title of the album was *Comin' Round the Mountain: Old Time Southern Singing and Playing in Western Washington*, and the cover photo of Roy Caudill and Henry Vanoy had been made in Darrington, Washington. The notes on the back of the sleeve, credited to the Williamses, were my first introduction to the legacy of southern musicians who brought their music to the Pacific Northwest.

Roy Caudill and Henry Vanoy from North Carolina. The Mills Family; Grady, Don, and their mother Lula Bell, all from Sylva, North Carolina. Paul Wiley, a banjo player from eastern Kentucky. Ellis Cowan and Ivan Hart, both from Missouri. Bill Pruett from near Waynesville, North Carolina. And finally, Fred McFalls and Ben Bryson, also from Sylva, North Carolina. All living and playing music in western Washington during the 1960s, when this record was produced from a combination of live concert tapes and home field recordings. As a young bluegrass and old-time music enthusiast in the Northwest, *Comin' Round the Mountain* made me aware of a deeply rooted traditional music community, the likes of which I had previously assumed could only be found in the Southeast.

Comin' Round the Mountain serves as a snapshot of the Tar Heel music community in Washington state, which is primarily attributed to a steady stream of migration from the mountains of western North Carolina to the densely-forested foothills of western Washington, with Darrington serving as its epicenter. Through archival research and interviews with family members and first-generation migrants, much of this project will focus on the key people and

places that comprised Washington's early bluegrass scene in the years following World War II. The later chapters will introduce Phil and Vivian Williams, along with some of their Seattle peers, highlighting their contributions that helped transform Tar Heel bluegrass into a thriving regional scene. Along the way, the project will be tied in with the wider discussions of Appalachian migration, geographical placement of bluegrass, the folk music revival, and development of musical communities, placing the Washington bluegrass scene in the larger context of bluegrass and country music.

At its core, this project argues that the contemporary bluegrass community in western Washington emerged from the collaboration of two main groups: the community of Appalachian migrants centered in Darrington and the branch of folk revivalists in Seattle that took an interest in bluegrass and related musics. One of its primary goals is to demonstrate the necessity of this collaboration across differing cultural backgrounds, to suggest that a sustained bluegrass community would not have developed without either party. Indeed, bluegrass music would have been played in Darrington, but for how long? Would it subside after a generation or two, or remain a localized phenomenon, invisible to the broader region? Likewise, bluegrass enthusiasts in Seattle might have organized themselves during the folk revival era, but what form would it take without the guiding influence of Fred McFalls and others in the Darrington community? By exploring the ways bluegrass took shape in western Washington, this project contributes to the growing body of literature tracing the development of bluegrass at its geo-cultural margins, further challenging stereotypes of who plays bluegrass, and where it originates. At the same time, it provides a focused example of how the folk revival of the 1960s contributed to the transition of bluegrass from a niche subgenre of country music to a standalone genre with a global audience.

Additional contributions can be identified within the context of Appalachian studies. For one, by demonstrating the influence of Darrington's Tar Heel bluegrass community, it recognizes some of the cultural contributions of Appalachian migrants far from their North Carolina homes. Furthermore, it sheds light on a significant stream of rural-to-rural migration, which has been largely overshadowed in Appalachian migration scholarship, where rural-to-urban streams of migration to the industrial Midwest have taken center stage. As Alexander points out, "Depending on the definition of Appalachia, only about 20 to 25 percent of Appalachian migrants to the Midwest lived in large cities in 1980. Like all southern whites, most Appalachian migrants lived in smaller cities and suburbs, though Appalachians were more likely than other southerners to live in the rural areas and big cities of the Midwest."[2] Given the percentages cited here, and the greater likelihood of Appalachian migrants settling in rural areas, studies of the Appalachian diaspora should be expanded to include rural destinations, an important component of this thesis.

Finally, one of the recurring themes throughout the course of this project is the critical role of women's labor in the development of a bluegrass community in western Washington. In her 2018 dissertation, Jordan Laney argues that "women often create (feminine) spaces and provide economic support to the [bluegrass] genre through unrecognized labor."[3] In so doing, she encourages future researchers to "rebuild a history, more fully inclusive of marginalized participants' roles in the genre and resulting narratives about the region."[4] Though not its primary focus, this thesis begins to answer Laney's call. In the following pages, several women

[2] J. Trent Alexander, "Defining the Diaspora: Appalachians in the Great Migration," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 37, no. 2 (2006). 234.
[3] Jordan L. Laney, "Recreating and Deconstructing the Shifting Politics of (Bluegrass) Festivals" (Ph.D. dissertation, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, 2018). 191.
[4] Ibid. 191.

are recognized as important contributors to the development of the Washington bluegrass community: Bertha (Nations) Whiteside, who has been a performer since the 1940s, a longtime bandleader, and later, a key member of the Darrington Bluegrass and Country Music Makers Association; Alice McFalls, who opened her home to the music, providing the space and hospitality that allowed musical relationships to flourish, and who helped organize the Tar Heel picnics at Everett's Forest Park; Irene Namkung, through her organizational efforts as co-founder of the Seattle Folklore Society, and providing artist representation through Traditional Arts Services; and finally, Vivian Williams, whose contributions as a musician, historian, and organizer are woven throughout this project. Additionally, several women have been fundamental to the success of the Darrington bluegrass festival since its inception. This work will be highlighted throughout the text, confirming the critical role women have performed in establishing Washington's bluegrass community from its earliest days.

Research Methods

The primary research for this project was conducted through personal interviews with key participants in the western Washington bluegrass community. With the goal of documenting both the establishment of a Tar Heel bluegrass community in Darrington, Washington, and its convergence with the urban folk revival community in Seattle, I sought to include a range of voices that could speak directly to one or both issues. I relied on purposive sampling and chain referral to identify potential participants, all of whom could be considered culturally specialized informants, according to Bernard.[5] Given my prior knowledge of the subject matter, having

[5] H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Lanham: AltaMira, 2011), 147-153.

previously been involved with the Washington bluegrass scene, I embarked on the project with an awareness of some of the individuals I hoped to speak with, and a cursory knowledge of their roles in the bluegrass community. Additional names were suggested to me as I began talking to people about my interest in the topic. Altogether, I reached out to fourteen individuals by phone or email, receiving permission to interview eleven of them. A qualitative study, the project design draws from Creswell's definitions of narrative research and ethnography,[6] as well as Sacks' description of oral history.[7]

It quickly became clear that this project would include two major phases of research: (1) Introducing Appalachian migration to Washington and the resulting Tar Heel bluegrass community, and; (2) Introducing the major contributors to Seattle's early bluegrass community, focusing on Phil and Vivian Williams. As such, I realized the need for two separate groups of participants who could speak with personal experience to one, or the other, phase of the project, allowing that there would inevitably be some overlapping knowledge.

The "first phase" group includes Bertha (Nations) Whiteside (accompanied by her daughter, Brenda Fecht), Janie McFalls-Bertalan, Rich Jones, and Carl Hale. Everyone in this group represents either a first or second-generation Appalachian family that migrated to Washington during the mid-twentieth century, and all are musicians, offering personal experience with Appalachia-based music communities in Washington. Bertha (Nations) Whiteside was born in North Carolina and moved to Darrington with her husband in the 1940s. Janie McFalls-Bertalan and Rich Jones were born in Washington to parents that moved to Darrington from North Carolina in the 1940s and 1950s. Carl Hale was born in Kentucky in the

[6] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 13-14.
[7] Howard L. Sacks, "Why Do Oral History?" in *Catching Stories: A Practical Guide to Oral History*, Donna M. DeBlasio et al. (Athens: Swallow Press, 2009), 1-3.

1930s, moving to the Mineral area in southwest Washington later in the same decade. All except Hale bring considerable experience in the Tar Heel bluegrass community, with McFalls-Bertalan and Jones also involved with the later Seattle bluegrass scene. Hale speaks to a parallel Appalachia-based music community in rural southwest Washington, which did not become a major area of focus in this project.

The "second phase" group includes Vivian Williams, Irwin Nash, John Ullman, Irene Namkung, Harley Worthington, Barry Brower, and Harley Bray. Each of these participants are musicians as well, and all became involved with the Seattle-area bluegrass scene at some point between the late 1950s and the early 1980s. Harley Worthington is an outlier in this group, as he did, in fact, come from Appalachia (East Tennessee), but as a member of the military service, not as part of the primary streams of Appalachian migration. He arrived on the scene around the same time as many of the Seattle-based participants, hence his inclusion with this group. Vivian Williams, Irwin Nash, John Ullman, and Irene Namkung were all heavily involved with the Seattle-area bluegrass and folk music communities throughout the 1960s and represent much of the source material for this phase of the project. Barry Brower arrives on the scene a little later, in the early 1970s, and Harley Bray, in the early 1980s, but both were active participants in the later Seattle bluegrass scene, and both played extensively with Phil and Vivian Williams.

Prior to establishing contact with potential interview participants, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program, an online research ethics course offered through the ETSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) office. Next, I submitted my proposed study to the IRB office for review, including sample interview questions. It was determined that my project did not fall under the definitions of human subject research and was exempt from IRB purview. Despite this exemption, I prepared an informed consent form to

review with potential interview participants prior to conducting interviews, explaining the nature of the project, and possible outcomes of the interview recordings and transcripts, including submission to ETSU's Archives of Appalachia. When I finally began contacting potential interview participants, I explained this to be primarily an oral history project, focusing on Appalachian migration to Washington, and the subsequent establishment of the Tar Heel bluegrass community, as well as the roles of Phil and Vivian Williams as major contributors to Washington's bluegrass and traditional music communities.

Most of the interviews were conducted in person at the participants' homes in western Washington. During a post-holiday visit with family in Wenatchee, Washington, I made two separate, multi-day trips to the greater Seattle area in January 2018, conducting interviews in Seattle, Edmonds, Everett, Mt. Vernon, Anacortes, Parkland, and Darrington. One additional interview was conducted by phone in February 2018, after my return to Tennessee. Although I conducted as many as three interviews per day, at different locations, I made no effort to set strict time limits. These qualitative interviews[8] were semistructured, as described by Bernard,[9] and typically lasted from one-and-a-half to two hours. For each meeting, I prepared a unique one-to-two-page interview guide, which included the general questions and topics I planned to cover, and was not provided to participants in advance, except when requested. The questions I asked typically followed Mould's definitions of open-ended questions, precision questions, and prompt or probe questions.[10] Common questions sought information about participants' biographical details, music backgrounds, and involvement in Washington bluegrass communities. For those with family ties to Appalachia, additional questions sought information

[8] Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 190.
[9] Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 157-158.
[10] David H. Mould, "Interviewing," in *Catching Stories: A Practical Guide to Oral History*, Donna M. DeBlasio et al. (Athens: Swallow Press, 2009), 97.

about the family's migration experience, traditions that have carried over, and any lasting connections with Appalachia. For those who became involved with bluegrass during the folk revival era, questions were focused on how they discovered their interest, and their perspectives or awareness of other revival-era issues, figures, and institutions. Additional questions were tailored to each individual participant, based on any prior knowledge I had, or in accordance with the natural flow of the interview.

Considering the scope of my topic, I wanted to include several voices that could speak to each major issue. As such, the total number of participants was rather high for a master's thesis but felt necessary for me to be able to provide depth of understanding to each topic. While the project benefits greatly from each voice included and could have benefited from a few that I was not able to reach, this did create some issues that ultimately resulted in the project taking far longer to complete than initially planned. Since the interviews were semistructured, and generally open-ended, I came home with well over twenty hours of raw audio to process and analyze. I had originally planned to make formal transcriptions of each interview, but in consultation with my professors, eventually shifted course to settle on a detailed note-taking strategy. This process involved revisiting the audio recordings of the interviews several times, to ensure that I could accurately represent the information I was given. Subsequently, I analyzed the notes with a combination of open coding and focused coding, identifying the themes and issues that arose from each interview, and then categorizing them according to the topics that fell within the scope of the study.[11]

[11] Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 172.

While writing the manuscript, I wanted to let the interview participants' voices tell the story as much as possible. As a result, the sections involving family histories, personal backgrounds, and the development of Washington music communities rely heavily on interviews as the primary source of data, with theoretical analysis and historical contextualization largely handled in separate sections. This reflects the need for balance in ethnographies: "An excessive concern for a scholarly framework and general concepts would distort and obscure the nuances of everyday life; but to simply present members' categories exclusively in their terms would produce texts devoid of relevance and interest to scholarly audiences."[12] Secondary sources were necessary in some areas, especially outlining the early history of country music in Washington, leading up to the Darrington Tar Heel bluegrass community of the 1950s and beyond. Northwest music historians Peter Blecha and Vivian Williams offer much valuable written research here, with some areas involving significant archival newspaper research, specifically *The Arlington Times*, which had a community section reserved for Darrington in the 1950s. As the narrative reaches the 1960s, I was able to draw from a larger pool of interview participants with direct experience, making it no longer necessary to rely so heavily on secondary sources.

A few terms warrant explanation before moving forward through the text. "Tar Heel" is frequently used in reference to the North Carolinians, and at times, other Appalachians, who migrated to Washington during the first half of the twentieth century. Additionally, it is used in reference to the brand of bluegrass music they became known for in Darrington and the surrounding area. While the term "Tar Heel" has sometimes been used in a derogatory context, here it is used as a self-identifier, and by all accounts, seems to carry with it a sense of pride and means of staying connected to a shared Appalachian cultural heritage. Other terms that may

[12] Ibid. 202.

cause some confusion include musical genre labels, such as "bluegrass," "country," "old-time," "folk," or "mountain music," as well as reference to the "folk revival" or "revivalists." On genre labels, "bluegrass" will be the primary term used, but exceptions exist where it feels too specific, or where interview participants use different language. As this is not a musical analysis, "bluegrass" is offered in a broad sense, rather than to imply a narrowly focused sub-style, instrumentation, or repertoire. Likewise, "folk revival" and "revivalist" are used generally, and for lack of better terminology, to describe the period from the late-1950s through the mid-1960s when large numbers of people around the country, frequently young, urban, and middle-class, became interested in various forms of folk music, many becoming active participants themselves.

Looking ahead, chapter two, "Appalachia Meets the North Cascades," briefly summarizes the prevailing scholarship on twentieth century Appalachian migration, before shifting focus to the branches that led to Washington, including distinct communities in the southwest portion of the state. Chapter three, "Revival and Community in Bluegrass," surveys literature concerning the postwar folk revival, particularly in its relationship with bluegrass, while introducing theoretical frameworks that provide contextual understanding, especially in the later chapters of this project. Chapter four, "Bluegrass Takes Root in the Northwest," introduces North Carolina native Fred McFalls and family, focusing on his musical activities that included pioneering Washington bluegrass band, the Carolina Mountain Boys. Chapter five, "Early Country Music in Washington," examines the musical landscape that preceded McFalls' arrival in Washington, from the long history of old-time fiddling to the postwar country scene in Darrington and elsewhere across the region. Chapter six, "Tar Heel Bluegrass," introduces some of Fred McFalls' contemporaries, specifically the Nations and Jones families, whose stories help illustrate the development of Darrington's Tar Heel bluegrass community, as well as some of the

local institutions that allowed it to thrive. Chapter seven, “Phil and Vivian,” introduces Phil and Vivian Williams, along with the Northwest folk scene as they found it in the 1950s. Chapter eight, “Meeting the Tar Heels,” follows Phil, Vivian, and friend Irwin Nash as they befriend McFalls and other Tar Heel musicians, establishing the connections that would allow Tar Heel bluegrass to expand beyond Darrington. Chapter nine, “Seattle Bluegrass Scene Takes Shape,” summarizes Phil and Vivian’s musical activities in the 1960s, as the Seattle bluegrass scene began to flourish. Chapter ten, “Organizing the Music,” covers the Seattle Folklore Society, Voyager Recordings, and the Northwest Folklife Festival; three institutions that Phil and Vivian were heavily involved with, all of which have had a major impact on bluegrass and folk music in the Northwest. Finally, chapter eleven, “Reflecting on Tar Heel Bluegrass in the Northwest,” brings the project to a close, discussing the Tar Heel bluegrass community’s ongoing legacy through the Darrington Bluegrass Festival, and Phil and Vivian’s continued engagement with Northwest music well into the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 2. APPALACHIA MEETS THE NORTH CASCADES

On the night of September 22, 2014, Washington State Route 530 reopened to bidirectional traffic for the first time since a massive mudslide swept through the small community of Oso, Washington, damming the North Fork of the Stillaguamish River and killing forty-three people exactly six months earlier.[13] The highway serves as the main artery between Arlington, along the busy I-5 corridor, and the town of Darrington, which lies at the base of the North Cascades in Washington's Snohomish County. While the disaster made national news, its resonance was especially strong in the Smoky Mountains of western North Carolina, where many residents of Darrington and the surrounding communities maintain family ties. Eighty-one-year-old Darrington resident and North Carolina native Frankie Nations-Bryson served her "Tar Heel" beans to disaster relief crews in the days following the slide; beans grown from seeds that originated in North Carolina, a fitting metaphor for the town.[14] Though migration between the two mountainous regions peaked in the mid-twentieth century, the bonds are still felt on both ends of the country. In Jackson County, North Carolina, the primary source of migrants to Washington,[15] *The Sylva Herald* frequently runs obituaries for those who made the move decades earlier.[16] The same publication ran articles in the wake of the slide, reaffirming the connection between the two communities, and keeping Jackson County residents informed of the recovery process, including a local perspective from Ralph Sherrill, a Jackson County native

[13] "Mudslide-Ravaged Highway in Oso Reopens After Six Months," NBC News, last modified September 23, 2014, https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/deadly-mudslide/mudslide-ravaged-highway-oso-reopens-after-six-months-n209661.
[14] Julie Muhlstein, "Darrington: A Family That Pulls Together," *Everett Herald*, March 25, 2014, http://www.heraldnet.com/news/darrington-a-family-that-pulls-together/.
[15] Lynn Hotaling, "More Evidence Circle Remains Unbroken," *The Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, April 16, 2014, http://www.thesylvaherald.com/columns/ruralite_cafe/article_7430e352-c575-11e3-a841-001a4bcf6878.html.
[16] Julie Muhlstein, "N.C. Town with Deep Kinship to Hold Fundraiser," *Everett Herald*, April 8, 2014, http://www.heraldnet.com/news/n-c-town-with-deep-kinship-to-hold-fundraiser/.

who moved west for logging work in 1960.[17] As such, it should be of little surprise that two history professors from Western Carolina University, Rob Ferguson and Scott Philyaw, both of whom have studied North Carolina-Washington migration, helped to organize a benefit concert in Sylva, the Jackson County seat, just a few weeks after the slide. Entitled "The Circle is Unbroken: A Benefit for Oso, Washington, from Western North Carolina," the event featured two local bluegrass bands—including Mountain Faith, who performed at the Darrington Bluegrass Festival in 2012—with donations sent to a relief fund in Washington.[18]

While this story of migration from Appalachia to the Pacific Northwest is well known to residents of communities that were directly affected, it remains notably absent from the primary literature on southern and Appalachian out-migration. A closer look at this movement allows for greater understanding of the continued development of both regions. For Appalachia, it's important to reconsider long-held myths of isolation, which serve to undermine the region's interwoven relationship with national culture. Bluegrass music is a compelling expression of this relationship; often attributed to the South, and Appalachia in particular, its history is accompanied by stories of movement and migration at nearly every turn. The major focus of this project concerns the bluegrass music community established by Appalachian migrants in Washington State, which was quickly adopted by a larger group of musicians and listeners in the area, creating a lasting cultural impact that can be observed on a national scale. This chapter will begin by summarizing the major scholarship on southern migration, followed by a more specific overview of literature concerning Appalachian migration to the Pacific Northwest. Further

[17] Lynn Hotaling, "County Native Adds Landslide Context," *The Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, April 2, 2014, http://www.thesylvaherald.com/columns/ruralite_cafe/article_4731b05e-ba79-11e3-9368-0017a43b2370.html?_dc=390348957618.6985&_dc=12879124376.922846.
[18] Muhlstein, "N.C. Town with Deep Kinship to Hold Fundraiser."

attention will be given to issues involving southern migration and music, providing context for the bluegrass music community that eventually took shape in western Washington.

Appalachian Migration

There has been great upheaval in the study of Appalachian and Southern migration over the past half century. A broad overview of the topic was published in a 2009 issue of *Appalachian Journal*, entitled "Major Turning Points: Rethinking Appalachian Migration." It collected many of the major voices in Appalachian migration scholarship, documenting a panel discussion that was presented at the 2007 Appalachian Studies Association Conference (ASA).[19] Roger Guy provided a valuable summary of Appalachian migration research up to the start of the 21st century. Early writing on the subject mostly included Appalachian migration as part of a larger movement of white Southerners to the urban, industrial North. Following World War II, Appalachians were singled out in this movement by sensationalized newspaper accounts that relied on common stereotypes, such as the infamous "hillbilly," to identify a problematic migrant community that required special attention. Guy uses the term "Visible Minority" to describe this era, during which Southern migrants, as a whole, were characterized by an impoverished minority, which was generally described in less than sympathetic terms. It wasn't until the 1970s that Appalachian migration was given its own platform in an academic setting, with scholars calling for empowerment and community action.[20]

[19] Phillip Obermiller et al., "Major Turning Points: Rethinking Appalachian," *Appalachian Journal* 36, no. 3/4 (2009). 164.
[20] Ibid. 165-166.

By the 1990s, scholarly perspectives were shifting from the narrow focus of Appalachian migration to a general "Southern Diaspora."[21] This new delineation returns Appalachian migrants to the larger discussion of Southern migration, but rather than highlight examples of poverty, it underscores the diversity of experience, suggesting that Southern white migrants were largely successful in achieving socio-economic mobility.[22] James Gregory is at the forefront of the more recent framing of the "Southern Diaspora," apparently introducing the term.[23] He states that, "Historians have until now fragmented the subject along lines of race and time period,"[24] while proposing a new approach that encompasses both black and white migration over a broad span of time, beginning at the turn of the 20th century, and continuing into the 1970s.[25] This ambitious strategy seeks to not only provide greater understanding of each migration by studying them side-by-side, but also hopes to provide greater insight to the lasting cultural impacts of the Southern Diaspora.[26] There is much to be said in favor of this approach, especially where it concerns the cultural influence of migrants, which is frequently overlooked in favor of socio-economic analysis. At the same time, both J. Trent Alexander and Chad Berry, in their contributions to the aforementioned ASA panel, rightly criticized Gregory's lack of attention to Appalachian migrants in particular, with Alexander confirming that Appalachians generally faced more difficult socio-economic hurdles than other Southern white migrants.[27] In essence, Alexander calls for a more nuanced approach that takes an encompassing view of Southern white migration, while still acknowledging the unique circumstances of Appalachian migrants.[28]

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[21] Ibid. 167.
[22] Ibid. 167.
[23] James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 11.
[24] Ibid. 5.
[25] Ibid. 5, 12.
[26] Ibid. 6-7.
[27] Obermiller et al., "Major Turning Points: Rethinking Appalachian," 170, 179.
[28] Ibid. 170.

While many have placed the start date for Appalachian migration around World War II, citing the vast outside labor opportunities created by the war, Berry moves the timeline up to World War I, or even earlier.[29] In *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles*, he describes the economic landscape in Appalachia following the Civil War. Farmers were struggling to maintain self-sufficiency in the face of the changing market economy, while absentee landowners and outside speculators increasingly controlled the land, with the coal and lumber industries eventually taking hold toward the end of the 19th century. Rural areas were becoming overpopulated and offered few opportunities, which influenced many Southerners to initially migrate to larger towns within the region. Cities like Atlanta, Nashville, and Roanoke were growing due to the railroad, wholesale, and manufacturing industries—Knoxville, Tennessee doubled in population between 1860 and 1880. The textile industry also experienced rapid growth near the turn of the century, further drawing people away from rural communities.[30]

In the edited volume entitled *Appalachian Odyssey: Historical Perspectives on the Great Migration* (2000), editors Thomas E. Wagner, Phillip J. Obermiller, and Bruce Tucker introduce the concept of "push-pull" migration, which describes "push" factors as those pressuring people to leave home, and "pull" factors being the opportunities awaiting them in new locations.[31] Using Berry's examples, the financial dependency and economic difficulty encounter by Appalachian farmers during the late 1800s would be a "push." The attractive wage-labor opportunities available in growing cities and mill towns were a "pull."[32] By the turn of the century, migrant labor was being drawn north by seasonal agricultural work and jobs in Ohio paper and rubber

[29] Chad Berry, *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 12.
[30] Ibid. 12-14.
[31] Phillip J. Obermiller, Thomas E. Wagner, and E. Bruce Tucker, eds., *Appalachian Odyssey: Historical Perspectives on the Great Migration* (Westport: Praeger Press, 2000), xi.
[32] Berry, *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles,* 14.

factories.[33] The next major "pull" was sparked by a series of circumstances following World War I. To start, immigration restrictions were put in place following the war, abruptly cutting off the flow of labor to Northern factories.[34] Additionally, with the increasing popularity of the automobile, supporting industries surged, with steel mills, auto factories, and rubber factories demanding a domestic source of labor.[35] Berry cites an estimate that suggests, "slightly more than two million whites moved out of the South in the first two decades of the twentieth century," while, "eleven eastern Kentucky agricultural counties lost almost a quarter of their population [in the 1920s]."[36] These figures clearly show that a stream of migration had been firmly established in the decades leading up to World War II.

For those not involved in military service, war industry jobs outside the region became a major "pull." Following the war, the economy boomed in much of the country, while industries in Appalachia (timber, coal, agriculture) retracted due to increased automation and the progression toward new energy sources, which moved away from coal as the primary fuel for heating.[37] In Kentucky alone, Berry cites a postwar reduction of 47% or 25,000 mining jobs between 1950 and 1955, as coal companies wasted little time mechanizing operations after the war.[38] Here again was a major "push." Appalachians and their fellow Southerners began moving north seeking new opportunities in droves, with the Appalachian region sustaining an estimated net loss of 4 million people to migration between 1940 and 1960.[39] Of this group, the majority left rural origins for urban destinations. Berry references Midwestern cities like Akron and Indianapolis with substantial migrant populations, and states that 75% of Kentucky migrants to

[33] Obermiller, Wagner, and Tucker, eds., *Appalachian Odyssey: Historical Perspectives on the Great Migration*, x.
[34] Ibid. x.
[35] Berry, *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles*, 18.
[36] Ibid. 19.
[37] Obermiller, Wagner, and Tucker, eds., *Appalachian Odyssey: Historical Perspectives on the Great Migration*, x.
[38] Berry, *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles*, 13.
[39] Obermiller et al., "Major Turning Points: Rethinking Appalachian," x.

Michigan ended up in cities of 100,000 or more.[40] The influx of Appalachian migrants after the war did not go unnoticed by city organizers in the North. Mischaracterized by baseless stereotypes, migrants faced difficulty finding adequate housing, employment, and educational opportunities.[41] Alexander confirms that Southern migrants fared better than other migrant groups in general, but white Appalachian migrants in large cities experienced a 30% poverty rate, which was comparable to Southern blacks and immigrant groups from eastern Europe, Mexico, and Vietnam.[42]

Given the amount of people that left Appalachia for industrial centers in the North, and the challenges many faced, it's no surprise that the "urban Appalachian" continues to be the central focus of migration research. Though scholars give cursory acknowledgement to non-urban migration, and migration to other parts of the country, Alexander rightfully points out that we must be selective in the stories we report on, seeking out narratives that have broader social implications.[43] While this project does not attempt to argue that Appalachian migration to the Pacific Northwest is comparable in scope or mass-cultural impact to the primary stream of Appalachian migration to the Midwest, it clearly merits investigation for its impact on the communities involved, and especially for the unique musical community it helped to produce.

Appalachians in Western Washington

The major pioneering scholarship on the subject of Appalachian migration to the Pacific Northwest belongs to Woodrow R. Clevinger, a second-generation migrant, whose family came

[40] Obermiller, Wagner, and Tucker, eds., *Appalachian Odyssey: Historical Perspectives on the Great Migration*, 8.
[41] Ibid. xii.
[42] Alexander, "Defining the Diaspora: Appalachians in the Great Migration," 235.
[43] Obermiller et al., "Major Turning Points: Rethinking Appalachian," 171.

from the Cumberland Mountains of Kentucky.[44] His 1940 thesis (*The Southern Appalachian Highlanders in Western Washington*) and 1955 dissertation (*The Western Washington Cascades: A Study of Migration and Mountain Settlement*), each completed at the University of Washington, represent nearly two decades of research on the settlement of the western slope of the Cascade Mountains in Washington State. Clevinger relied on census, county, voting registration, and newspaper records, in addition to extensive interviews, to document migration patterns to the western Washington Cascades, outlining concentrated population movements from the Cumberland Plateau of eastern Kentucky, West Virginia, and southwest Virginia, and parallel movements from the Smoky Mountains of eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina. Additionally, information on the related migration of peoples from the Ozark-Ouachita uplands of Missouri and Arkansas is represented in his work.

Local acknowledgement of Appalachian in-migration to western Washington first began to appear around 1910, with sensationalized newspaper accounts quick to highlight Appalachian stereotypes of lawlessness: violation of game laws, illicit distilling, or violence that might be cast as a mountain feud.[45] In fact, Appalachian migrants began arriving in Washington as early as 1870. Clevinger cites two major "pulls" for this initial migration. One factor, common to most migration patterns, was the possibility of greater economic opportunity. Loggers and others employed by the timber industry began leaving the Cumberland Plateau region of eastern Kentucky, southwest Virginia, and West Virginia in pursuit of higher wages elsewhere. Some landed in the forests of northern Wisconsin, while others stopped over in Missouri and Arkansas, where many eventually continued to the Pacific Northwest. Those that went directly to

[44] Woodrow R. Clevinger, "The Western Washington Cascades: A Study of Migration and Mountain Settlement" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, 1955). Frontispiece.
[45] Woodrow R. Clevinger, "The Southern Appalachian Highlanders in Western Washington" (Master's thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, 1940). 8.

Washington and Oregon found wages two or three dollars higher than what they had left behind.[46] The other significant "pull" during this period was the Federal Homestead Act of 1862, which led to nearly half a century of Western migration, with 80 million acres of public land distributed by 1900.[47] As the availability of land in Appalachia decreased, due to overpopulation and outside interests, the possibility of staking a claim in western Washington became an obvious draw. This stream continued until 1907, when President Theodore Roosevelt designated thousands of acres of western Washington land as forest reserve (soon renamed National Forest), significantly reducing the availability of real estate for would-be homesteaders.[48] As Clevinger demonstrates through data obtained from approximately 200 interviews with migrant families, a sharp decline in Appalachian migration to western Washington ensued.

Several other factors were at play that allowed this interruption to remain temporary. For one, there was an ongoing recruitment effort by the railroads to draw Appalachian migrants west by train. Per Clevinger, "The Chesapeake and Ohio, in conjunction with the Northern Pacific, offered plans whereby a large group could charter an entire coach to Washington at a cost of about $40 for each individual. Each emigrant was assured of employment or a homestead when he reached Washington. In Pike County, Kentucky, and Buchanan County, Virginia, several coachload groups took advantage of this plan and emigrated to Lewis County."[49] Approximately 95% of the individuals he surveyed came to Washington by train, mostly between 1890 and 1920, which he considers a continuation of "the old type of frontier movement, using modern

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[46] Ibid. 19-20.
[47] "Homestead Act: Primary Documents in American History," The Library of Congress, accessed March 27, 2021, https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Homestead.html.
[48] Gerald W. Williams, *The USDA Forest Service: The First Century* (Washington, DC: USDA Forest Service Office of Communication, 2005), https://www.fs.fed.us/sites/default/files/media/2015/06/The_USDA_Forest_Service_TheFirstCentury.pdf. 25.
[49] Clevinger, "The Southern Appalachian Highlanders in Western Washington," 22.

methods of transportation."[50] During the 1910s, new economic opportunities also began to attract settlement in the Washington Cascades. In addition to the growing timber industry, the management of National Forest lands and the beginnings of hydroelectric development provided job outlets for continuing streams of migration, originating in Appalachia as well as several parts of the Midwest.[51]

One of the common threads that ties together all major streams of Appalachian migration is the kinship factor. In a case study of Beech Creek, Kentucky, published in 1971, communication among family members is cited as the primary means of channeling information about employment and living standards back home, which helps to explain why there is a tendency for family and community members to congregate in localized areas. Of those that left Beech Creek, Kentucky, nearly 75% settled in Ohio within a 30-mile radius of each other, establishing "cultural islands" known as "little Kentuckies."[52] Likewise, Clevinger describes this strength of family and community as "one of the major determinants in [the] pattern of emigration and resettlement" to the Pacific Northwest, though family movement might occur over the course of decades.[53] The same terminology—"Little Kentucky" or "Little Tennessee"—appears in reference to clusters of Appalachian migrants in Washington.[54] Overall, Clevinger's data suggests that approximately 100 family units had contributed to a wave of Appalachian migration that totaled nearly 15,000 by 1940.[55]

While it might be convenient to view Appalachian migration to western Washington as one large movement, Clevinger identifies two distinct, parallel streams. Up to 1940, an estimate

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[50] Ibid. 23-25.
[51] Clevinger, "The Western Washington Cascades: A Study of Migration and Mountain Settlement," 319.
[52] Harry K. Schwarzweller, James S. Brown, and J.J. Mangalam, *Mountain Families in Transition: A Case Study of Appalachian Migration* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971). 83-97.
[53] Clevinger, "The Southern Appalachian Highlanders in Western Washington," 25-28.
[54] Ibid. 3.
[55] Ibid. 29-30.

of 6,000 to 8,000 people left eastern Kentucky, southwest Virginia, and West Virginia, settling in Lewis and Cowlitz counties in southwest Washington. Clevinger notes that they were "more or less acquainted with each other and frequently interrelated through marriage."[56] In the northwest corner of Washington, Skagit and Snohomish counties absorbed over 4,000 people from the Blue Ridge and Smoky Mountains of eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina during this same general period leading up to World War II.[57] The key difference between these migration streams and those to the industrial Midwest is that the overwhelming majority ultimately settled in rural areas. Of those interviewed by Clevinger, most expressed their distaste for the more populated lowlands, and over 90% in rural areas self-identified as part-time farmers, in addition to their affiliation with the timber industry.[58] This suggests that Appalachian migrants to Washington were far more successful in maintaining their rural, agricultural lifestyles than their counterparts in Midwestern cities. By 1940, Clevinger estimates that nearly one-third of the population of the western Washington Cascades had originated in southern Appalachia.[59]

Southwest Washington and the Hale Family

In response to Clevinger's study, Harry Robie received grant funding from Berea College and the University of Kentucky to conduct follow-up research in western Washington in 1990. Robie was interested to learn whether the transplanted Appalachian communities of Clevinger's research still maintained connections with their eastern relatives, and by extension, how they had fared in terms of poverty, education, and other issues of concern in southeastern Kentucky. In

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[56] Ibid. 4.
[57] Ibid. 6.
[58] Ibid. 20, 33.
[59] Ibid. 3.

southwest Washington, they found that correspondence was still maintained with sister churches in Kentucky and West Virginia, noting that religion was one of the primary bonding factors still observed among "Cascade Appalachians." However, the stream of migration had mostly dried up, and younger descendants were in the process of leaving the small mountain towns. The timber industry, by this time, had been in serious decline for a decade. However, Robie found reason for optimism in the educational outcomes, as the children of his informants had all graduated high school, with many continuing on to college.[60] Among the Appalachian migrants Robie spoke with were two members of the Hale family; Mabel Hale Compton and Corbett Hale. The latter played a major in bringing Kentuckians to the Morton, Washington area: "For over forty years he attended Old Regular Baptist church association meetings back east, and every return trip he brought some more former neighbors back with him."[61]

While investigating the history of Appalachian music in southwest Washington, I was put in contact with Carl Hale, who happens to be Corbett Hale's son. Although my research did not yield significant information about music communities in that part of the state, Carl was able to provide some insight on the subject, as well as his own direct experience with Appalachian migration. Born in Wolfpen Hollow, Kentucky, in 1932, his given name is Carley, honoring a relative on the Stamper side of the family—the same Stampers that claim distinguished bluegrass and old-time fiddler, Art Stamper, who Carl became acquainted with in later years.[62]

Describing what it was like growing up in Kentucky as a child, Carl told me they had no refrigeration, no indoor plumbing, and raised their own food, which included churning butter. "Everything was down (in Kentucky) because it was the Depression...Dad got a few days' work

[60] Harry Robie, "Fifty Years Later: The Appalachian Populations of the Washington Cascades," *Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association*, no. 9 (1993).
[61] Ibid.
[62] Carl Hale, interview by author, Parkland, January 6, 2018.

with [the Works Progress Administration]—a dollar a day—[working] on the roads and stuff." Carl grew up in a musical environment, his father playing the banjo in a clawhammer or frailing style, which he compared to Lee Sexton—another relative by marriage. "Dad always had banjos or guitars…he used to play the old-time banjo for the square dance tunes in the mountains," which were typically Saturday night suppers at the local schoolhouse. "He never did pick up the banjo after he got out here…he was working hard and drinking hard too."[63]

Carl's father also had a moonshine still operating at the farm in Kentucky, located in a secret room in an old cabin further up the hollow. "We made a little side money that way," explained Carl, who—at seven years old—would go with his father to hide the moonshine, or retrieve it when a customer came. "All the revenooers, they knew what was going on, because you had to go buy the sugar, and when you buy X amount of sugar, all they had to do was go down to the store and check it out. But they never did bust him…it was survival time."[64]

Following an older brother, who moved to the Mineral, Washington area in search of logging work around 1900, Carl's father sought work in the Cascades during the Great Depression, bringing money back to his family in Kentucky. In 1940, he brought his family with him, having to sell their Kentucky farm for seventy-five dollars in order to pay for a Model A Ford, and enough fuel to make the trip. The whole family loaded into the car, including Carl's father, mother, four younger siblings, and a paying passenger to help with gas. "Mom baked up the cornbread and soup beans, had them all stored away on top of the rig and on the side like a bunch of Okies. But we were Kentuckians...I stood up most of the way from Kentucky to Washington state." Carl offered some insight about his mother's perspective of the move, telling

[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

me, “I remember Mom saying before we left that cabin on the hill down [in Kentucky] that, ‘When we get to Washington State…I’m going to have rugs on my floors.’”[65]

Carl told me many of his relatives are located in Mineral and explained his family’s role in the migration there. “Uncle Gene—my great uncle, grandpa’s brother, who lived in Mineral—was kind of the waystation for all the Kentuckians migrating. But then later on, Dad and Mom’s house became the waystation for the Kentuckians. They’d come and they’d live with us until they got work. Usually, the work was in the log woods. A few of them, we’d like to get them out of the house a little earlier—some of them wasn’t as ambitious as my dad [laughs].”[66]

They stayed in Mineral for a few years, before moving to Bear Canyon, near Morton. “We were kind of transit loggers...In those days, the work in the woods was so good that Dad could say, ‘Take this job and shove it,’ and he’d be working the next day for another company.” After several moves in the area, they settled near Eatonville around the end of World War II, with Carl graduating high school there in 1950.[67]

Eventually, his father broke his hip in a logging accident, and after he quit drinking, “found the good Lord,” and became an Old Regular Baptist preacher. He began traveling to a convention near Hazard, Kentucky every year, and Carl would ride along by the time he was sixteen, often enlisted as driver. Harkening back to Robie’s research, Carl confirms that his father “brought a lot of people out of Kentucky” during these trips. For Carl, the eldest Hale child, these frequent visits allowed him to develop a strong connection with his home state.[68]

When Carl was around the age of twelve, an Assembly of God preacher was making a survey in Eatonville, and noticing guitars at the Hale home, said to Carl’s mother, “Send that boy

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[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

down to Sunday school and I'll teach him a few chords on the guitar." This is how Carl got started playing music. His Uncle Lem, who they brought out from the coal mines of Kentucky in 1951, "was one of the best mandolin pickers in the country. He played all up through Ohio and Detroit...Dad and I went back there after my graduation and we went into the Little Pony mines that he was working in—only time I'd ever been in a coal mine—about less than a half a mile back. He said to his half-brother, 'Wanna go to Washington?' [Lem] says, 'Let's go.' He threw down his shovel and we crawled out of that little old mine, and we come across Route 66. He played for years with me, the mandolin, but now he's two years younger than me, and he's slowly [experiencing] memory loss, just can't hear."[69]

Lem and Carl were hired to dedicate the first streetlight in Mineral, in 1952, playing as The Hale Brothers. They wore bibbed overalls, told corny jokes, and played songs. Carl's brother Chuck played bass with them, and they covered songs by Hank Williams, as well as early bluegrass repertoire. Once winning second place in a competition at Mossy Rock High School, they had an offer to perform on the radio in Centralia every Saturday but were too busy with other obligations. Representing one of western Washington's earliest examples of a semi-professional band with Appalachian roots, the group dissolved when Carl went into the Air Force. Following his time in the service, Carl played with another southwest Washington group, called Sweet Sounds of Bluegrass, winning a band contest in Vancouver, Washington around 1959 or 1960.[70]

After putting music aside during a twenty-year marriage, Carl eventually got back into it, playing music all over Alaska, while living there, as well as various service clubs, street fairs, and grange halls in places like Puyallup, Matlock, Olympia, Buckley, and Enumclaw. "Every

[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.

song that I sing, just about, I've experienced. Whether it's death, divorce, the love of God, lost love. And I never have anything in front of me, because I don't know one note of music. What I'm singing is up, either in here [points to head], or in my heart. I like that." He remains involved with bluegrass and country music in Washington today.[71]

Although this study has not revealed a sustained Appalachian-rooted bluegrass community in southwest Washington, Carl's story suggests that the small logging towns in that part of the state may have at one time held similar musical potential to the more widely known Tar Heel community in northwest Washington. However, the contemporary Washington bluegrass community is surprisingly well-represented here, despite having no confirmed link to the Appalachian migration pathways of the early 1900s. Currently, several Washington bluegrass festivals are held in this part of the state, with the Washington Bluegrass Association being headquartered in Toledo, just west of the area where Carl grew up.

Music in Migration, Migration in Music

Having established a significant pattern of Appalachian migration to the Pacific Northwest, this investigation turns to the music that was ever-present in the lives of many migrants. Southern Appalachia has long been associated with a deeply rooted folk music tradition, which was at one time a primary source of entertainment and community, especially for those in rural areas. Fiddlin' Bill Hensley, primarily based in western North Carolina during the early 20th century, cited the prevalence and subsequent decline of community-oriented events in his time, including log-raisings and hog killings, which always culminated with food and

[71] Ibid.

music; fiddles and banjos accompanying singing and dancing. Hensley might be hired to play square dances two or three times per week, and was a frequent participant at old-time fiddling contests.[72] Dances were also among the organized social activities held in company towns associated with the timber industry, such as Blackwood in Jackson County, North Carolina.[73] It comes as no surprise that music, a major part of daily life for many Appalachians in the early 20th century, would accompany those that relocated to other parts of the country. Nevertheless, there is surprisingly little scholarly attention given to music as a component of Appalachian migration.

A 2016 dissertation by Nathan McGee, entitled *Sounds Like Home: Bluegrass Music and Appalachian Migration in American Cities, 1945-1980*, presents an in-depth investigation of the relationship between Appalachian migration and bluegrass music. The development of bluegrass neatly parallels the progression of Appalachian migration to the industrial Midwest, with its roots in the early country and hillbilly music industry of the 1920s and 1930s, and surging along with the migration trend in the years following World War II. As McGee reminds us, migration stories frequently accompanied early country musicians, including such luminaries as Ernest Stoneman and his family, whose economic circumstances during the Great Depression caused them to leave Galax, Virginia for the greater Washington D.C. area.[74] McGee's research is focused on some of the primary destination cities for Appalachian migrants: Cincinnati, Dayton, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C.[75] Characterizing the role of cities as "bluegrass laboratories," McGee asserts that bluegrass was crafted and refined amongst the various influences that

[72] David P. Bennett, "A Study of Fiddle Tunes from Western North Carolina" (Master's thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1940). 19-20.
[73] Robert A. McCall, "The Timber Industry in Jackson County, North Carolina" (Master's thesis, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, 1984). 46.
[74] Nathan McGee, "Sounds Like Home: Bluegrass Music and Appalachian Migration in American Cities, 1945-1980" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, 2016). 48.
[75] Ibid. 3.

intermingled in the urban environments of the Upper Midwest and Atlantic Seaboard, with agents of the music industry, folk revival, and urban advocacy organizations largely responsible for its attribution to rural Appalachia.[76]

Musicians were also responsible for emphasizing rural imagery in their presentation as a means of exploiting public interest in "authentic" Appalachian folk music, which emanated from migrant populations searching for nostalgic connections to home, as well as urban folk revival audiences who sought alternatives to contemporary music perceived as too commercial.[77] One such example was Bradley Kincaid, an early star of the WLS National Barn Dance in Chicago, who recognized the importance of his identification as a "hillbilly from Kentucky," capitalizing on it as a means of promoting himself. He received an enormous amount of fan mail from Appalachian migrants in Midwestern cities who identified with this persona and found nostalgic comfort in his music.[78] The example of Kincaid and the success of the National Barn Dance provide a framework for musicians and promoters to follow, serving as a model for successive radio programming, like the Grand Ole Opry, and for early country and hillbilly musicians, including those that developed bluegrass.[79]

Another southern migrant who began his musical career with WLS in Chicago was Bill Monroe, who followed his older brothers north from Kentucky in search of factory work.[80] Though oft-cited, the Monroe brothers' migration story may be undervalued in bluegrass and country music scholarship; without the commercial opportunities available in a large urban center, and the refinery work that allowed Monroe to supplement a fledgling music career, it's

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[76] Ibid. iii, 3, 182-183.
[77] Ibid. iii, 25-28, 137-140.
[78] Ibid. 25-28.
[79] Ibid. 10, 17.
[80] Ibid. 16.

difficult to imagine the "Father of Bluegrass" gaining traction in the music industry. Additionally, little attention is given to the melting pot of musical influences he would have been exposed to in such a culturally diverse city as Chicago. Richard Smith, in his biography of Monroe, only briefly alludes to Monroe's exposure to jazz music during this time.[81] The transient nature of the music industry eventually led Monroe, then-partnered with brother Charlie as the Monroe Brothers, to other parts of the Midwest and South; first Shenandoah, Iowa, followed by Omaha, Nebraska, Columbia, South Carolina, and eventually Charlotte, North Carolina, where they recorded radio transcriptions that were distributed to several other Southern cities.[82] This gave the Monroe Brothers wide exposure to listeners across the Midwest and South, further demonstrating that Monroe, who would eventually be credited with the development of bluegrass, was never limited to a rural or Appalachian audience.

McGee is among the contributing authors featured in a 2021 anthology, *Industrial Strength Bluegrass: Southwestern Ohio's Musical Legacy*, which further expands on the significance of Appalachian migration to the development of bluegrass music. In his preface, Curtis Ellison underscores the importance of examining this relationship:

> The story of bluegrass music outside the mountains magnifies a larger one of how Appalachian migrants and their descendants helped reshape American life in the twentieth century. It began with migration to the central Midwest and elsewhere and includes the spreading influence of their work ethic, religion, literature, language, folkways, foodways, and family structures. And that influence certainly includes the novel music business created to serve them: the radio stations, recording studios, record labels, nightclubs and other performance venues, churches, gospel music showcases, and music festivals that gave rise to prominent artists and built the national visibility of bluegrass music.[83]

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[81] Richard D. Smith, *Can't You Hear Me Callin': The Life of Bill Monroe, Father of Bluegrass* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000). 31.
[82] Neil V. Rosenberg and Charles K. Wolfe, *The Music of Bill Monroe* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007). 4-5.
[83] Fred Bartenstein and Curtis W. Ellison, eds., *Industrial Strength Bluegrass: Southwestern Ohio's Musical Legacy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021). xix.

This coincides with the central theme of this thesis, regarding Appalachian migration to the Pacific Northwest, and ensuing cultural developments. It represents an opportunity not only to recognize the important contributions of Appalachian migrants to broader American culture, but also to illustrate some of the ways bluegrass music has grown out of this confluence of people from varied cultural and geographical backgrounds.

Robert Hunt Ferguson, previously referenced as a co-organizer of the benefit concert for Oso, made a significant contribution to the study of Appalachian music and western migration, with his 2004 thesis, *Carolina Mountain Home: Place, Tradition, Migration, and an Appalachian Musical Family*. Covering much of the same geographical territory studied here—from Jackson County, North Carolina to the counties of northwest Washington State—Hunt focuses on the North Carolina and Washington branches of the Queen family, whose musical impact can be felt on both ends of the country. Identifying an imbalance in Appalachian music scholarship, which has tended to focus heavily on communities such as the White Top and Galax areas of Virginia, Hunt makes a case for the southwestern counties of North Carolina having a comparable influence.[84] Using the Queen family as an example, Hunt suggests that the music of southern migrants "served as a kind of glue that held relocated communities together in this new environment," while demonstrating that "out-migrants from southwestern North Carolina acted as cultural ambassadors in introducing and popularizing Appalachian music in Washington state."[85] Indeed, the same can be said for the McFalls, Nations, and Jones families, who will be introduced in the following pages. Furthermore, Hunt explains that "North Carolina migrants not only sustained their musical traditions in Washington, they also built and cultivated music

[84] Robert Hunt Ferguson, "Carolina Mountain Home: Place, Tradition, Migration, And An Appalachian Musical Family" (Master's thesis, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, 2004). 23.
[85] Ibid. 24.

communities in their new surroundings."[86] Where Hunt underscores the role of the Darrington Bluegrass Festival in cultivating these new communities, this project will focus on the development of Washington's bluegrass community in the years leading up to the Darrington's first festival in 1977, placing the Darrington festival as more of a culminating factor, rather than an initiating factor, in the development of the regional bluegrass scene.

Having explored the influence of migration on the development of bluegrass, it is also important to consider academic discussions involving the geographical placement of bluegrass, and more broadly, country music. One of the common tendencies in bluegrass scholarship is to concede its origins almost exclusively to Appalachia. Among other things, this requires us to ignore Bill Monroe's non-Appalachian upbringing, as well as the wide-ranging non-Appalachian influences that were critical in shaping the music, from Jimmie Rodgers to Western Swing. Even McGee, while asserting bluegrass as the product of urban development, allows that it was "birthed in the mountains."[87] Of course, there is no denying bluegrass music's numerous ties to the Appalachian region, but at its core, it is a music founded in movement and wide-ranging influences, not to be constrained by strict boundaries. Rosenberg offers some needed clarity, explaining that "elements of bluegrass repertoire, style, and instrumentation do come from that region and many important bluegrass musicians are natives or second-generation descendants of mountaineers…but [bluegrass] is not co-terminous with Appalachia."[88] Much the same can be said for country music's relationship with the South.[89]

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[86] Ibid. 52.
[87] McGee, "Sounds Like Home: Bluegrass Music and Appalachian Migration in American Cities, 1945-1980," 14.
[88] Neil V. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 13.
[89] The geographical discourse surrounding bluegrass and country music is frequently attributed to Bill Malone's "Southern thesis," which was critiqued by several prominent music scholars during a panel discussion at the International Country Music Conference in 2010. Entitled "Is Country Music Only Southern Music? Some Fresh Thoughts," the panel sought to "assert the longtime existence and legitimacy of urban and rural country musicians in the Northeast and Midwest," in direct response to Malone, who himself was included as a commentator. This

An increasing number of studies are beginning to place bluegrass in a broader national, or global, context. Among the early contributions in this area, Hambly's 1980 article on the regional characteristics of bluegrass in the San Francisco Bay Area analyzes the differences of geography, culture, social behavior, and musical style witnessed in the early decades of the northern California bluegrass scene.[90] Chronicling the growth of a bluegrass audience in Japan, Mitsui helps place the music as an international phenomenon. Interestingly, with regard to the geographical origins of bluegrass, Japanese audiences did not associate the music with the American South until the 1970s—rather, it was "simply something fascinating from 'America,' a land with richness, expansion, democracy, and possibilities."[91] Finch's dissertation explores the development of Toronto's bluegrass scene from the 1950s to the 1980s, reflecting many of the same processes at work in the Seattle scene, including migration, the folk revival, and the outgrowth of supportive organizations. Learning mechanisms are described in great detail, highlighting a key deviation from the Seattle scene—the lack of a group of "mentors or knowledge-bearers," akin to Washington's Tar Heel bluegrass community.[92] Finally, Bidgood explores the popularity and meaning of bluegrass in the Czech Republic, introducing the term "Czech Americanism," to describe how bluegrass (and Americana) has been re-contextualized as part of Czech life. The high number of bluegrass bands and festivals in the country underscores the enthusiastic embrace of the music by Czech listeners.[93] By including Washington's bluegrass

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conversation was revisited in a 2014 issue of the Journal of American Folklore, dedicated to country music: *Journal of American Folklore* 127 (504): 124.

[90] Scott Hambly, "San Francisco Bay Area Bluegrass and Bluegrass Musicians: A Study in Regional Characteristics," *JEMF Quarterly* 16, no. 59 (1980): 111-117.

[91] Toru Mitsui, "The Reception of the Music of American Southern Whites in Japan," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 279-280.

[92] Mark Finch, "Bluegrass In and Around Toronto: Urban Scenes, Regional Imaginaries, and Divergent Trajectories" (Ph.D. dissertation, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, 2016).

[93] Lee Bidgood, "The Americanist Imagination and Real Imaginary Place in Czech Bluegrass Songs," *Popular Music and Society* 41.4 (2018): 390–407.

scene to the conversation, this project will contribute to the growing body of literature that re-evaluates bluegrass music's geographical boundaries and interpretations.

CHAPTER 3. REVIVAL AND COMMUNITY IN BLUEGRASS

One of the goals of this project is to demonstrate how the convergence of two disparate music communities resulted in the formation of a sustained bluegrass scene in the Pacific Northwest. On the one hand, we have the Tar Heel community, centered around Darrington, Washington. As tradition-bearers, members of this group were largely responsible for bringing bluegrass and southern mountain music to Washington from their native homes in western North Carolina. On the other hand, there is the Seattle folk revival community of the late 1950s and early 1960s, representing a microcosm of the larger folk music revival spreading across the country at that time. Members of the Seattle community, having taken an interest in bluegrass, began interacting with the Tar Heels, and through their combined efforts, helped establish the foundation for a vibrant regional bluegrass scene that continues to thrive today. From a broader historical perspective, this invites a discussion of music revivals and music communities in order to better contextualize the roles of the various individuals and institutions that helped lay the groundwork for Washington's bluegrass scene of the 1960s and beyond.

As bluegrass expanded to young, urban audiences in Seattle, the music community of the Pacific Northwest reflected the embrace of bluegrass by the post-war folk music revival, a socio-cultural movement that was popularized on a national scale by the late 1950s. In the Northwest, as elsewhere, bluegrass would experience a major shift because of this interaction. Contrasted against the traditional country music audience, Rosenberg identifies "a new group of listeners who perceived bluegrass as a separate and distinct musical art form. Educated in American folk music via Folkways and Library of Congress recordings which emphasized Appalachian folk music traditions, they quickly recognized the traditional elements in bluegrass performance

practice and repertoire."[94] For many revival-era bluegrass enthusiasts, Folkways Records' 1957 LP, *American Banjo Scruggs Style,* was the first in-depth exposure to bluegrass music on record. Curated by Mike Seeger, the inherent emphasis on the 5-string banjo appealed to a revival audience, to whom it was a novel and exciting sound.

Ralph Rinzler's accompanying liner notes further distinguished bluegrass from commercial country music, emphasizing the "instrumentation, the roles of the instruments, and the closeness of the songs to folksong traditions," while firmly placing it outside the mainstream country genre as a "kind of modern folk music."[95] For the middle-class, college-educated revivalist, Rinzler's characterization of bluegrass as folk music aligned with a romanticized notion of folksong as the "organic expression of cultural heritage," which gave voice to the working class.[96] For many, the revival also sparked a genuine interest in learning about people from different backgrounds, which brought with it a desire to elevate "artistic expressions they believed to be threatened by the homogenizing effects of mass culture."[97] Consequently, revival audiences were able to reconcile their political ideals with the sometimes-disparate cultural views endemic to the conservative, southern communities to which bluegrass is so often attributed.

Rosenberg offers two general observations about revivals, suggesting that "the things being revived (1) haven't completely died out—that is, however moribund they may be they don't necessarily require revival—and (2) are made into something different by the revival process."[98] The last point echoes Feintuch's suggestion that we "understand folk music revivals

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[94] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 109-110.
[95] Ibid. 110-112.
[96] Ibid. 144.
[97] Ibid. 170.
[98] Neil V. Rosenberg, "Starvation, Serendipity, and the Ambivalence of Bluegrass Revivalism," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 194.

as transformations."[99] Although bluegrass had clearly not died out upon its embrace by the revival community, it is possible that the aforementioned "homogenizing effects of mass culture" may have left bluegrass to wither away as a forgotten subgenre of country music. Instead, its embrace by revivalists helped to establish it as a globally recognized, standalone genre, that would eventually develop its own infrastructure of performance venues, record labels, and by the 1980s, its own trade association—the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA). This "transformation" has absolutely made bluegrass "something different" in the process, of which the qualities are an ongoing matter of debate. Recent discussions in the public sphere, concerning the definitions and boundaries of bluegrass, are perhaps best exemplified by Chris Pandolfi's keynote address at the 2011 IBMA World of Bluegrass convention, and his later essay, "Two Worlds of Bluegrass Music," published in a 2016 issue of *No Depression*.[100]

The impact of the revival may be best observed in the career arc of Bill Monroe, who was formally introduced to revival audiences as the "father of blue grass music" by soon-to-be-manager Ralph Rinzler in the February-March 1963 issue of *Sing Out!* Magazine.[101] A member of the Greenbriar Boys—a byproduct of New York's famed Washington Square Park social scene, arguably the epicenter of the folk music revival—Rinzler was a skilled multi-instrumentalist in his own right, but "preferred to act the interlocutor, discovering and introducing traditional musicians," having previously introduced Clarence Ashley and Doc Watson to the revival crowd in 1961.[102]

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[99] Burt Feintuch, "Music Revival as Musical Transformation," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 192.
[100] Video of Pandolfi's 2011 IBMA keynote address can be viewed at https://vimeo.com/29731282; "Two Worlds of Bluegrass Music" is included in the "Bluegrass Beyond" issue of *No Depression* (Winter 2016), and can be accessed digitally on Pandolfi's website: http://chrispandolfi.com/?p=1495.
[101] Ralph Rinzler, "Bill Monroe—The Daddy of Blue Grass Music," in *The Bluegrass Reader*, ed. Thomas Goldsmith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 137.
[102] Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival & American Society, 1940-1970* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 172.

Up until this point, Monroe's career in the country music industry was on the decline, as Nashville shifted toward a smooth, commercial pop aesthetic.[103] With Rinzler's help, Monroe made his revival debut in early 1963, with performances at the University of Chicago Folk Festival, a Friends of Old Time Music concert in New York, and later that summer at the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island. During this period, Monroe hired his first "Yankee folksong revivalist," Boston-native Bill Keith, whose banjo playing generated a level of excitement among Monroe fans that harkened back to the days of Earl Scruggs, Don Reno, and Rudy Lyle.[104] With the help of Los Angeles folk luminary, Ed Pearl, Monroe soon found a new audience on the west coast as well, performing at the UCLA Folk Festival and Monterey Folk Festival, as well as Pearl's own folk-oriented club, the Ash Grove.[105]

When the first Roanoke Bluegrass Festival was staged in 1965, Monroe was further immortalized in Carlton Haney's "The Story of Blue Grass Music," a live presentation, which aimed to present a Monroe-centric history of bluegrass, with several former Blue Grass Boys joining him onstage. Monroe's current band at the Roanoke festival demonstrated just how intertwined he and the revival had become, comprised of so-called "citybillies" Peter Rowan (Boston), Lamar Grier (Washington, D.C.), and Gene Lowinger (New Jersey).[106] The audience reflected much the same, per Rinzler: "'Several hundred city-billy enthusiasts and musicians wearing the uniform (blue jeans, a few beards and sandals or tennis shoes) mixed with salt-of-the-earth farmers and factory works from nearby Roanoke.'"[107] Basking in the renewed interest in his music, Monroe adopted a more personable demeanor on stage, further bolstering the

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[103] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 166.
[104] Ibid. 182-183.
[105] Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival & American Society, 1940-1970*, 211, 255.
[106] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 209-211.
[107] Ibid. 207.

"grandfatherly" image he was beginning to embrace.[108] Riding this wave of momentum, Monroe started his own festival at Bean Blossom in 1967, and along with the rest of his peers, enjoyed the expanding audience and improved financial prospects that accompanied the festival movement as it spread across the country in the 1970s. For Monroe, and for bluegrass on a larger scale, the folk revival played a critical role in changing its trajectory from that of great uncertainty, to the beginnings of a modest, but sustaining, bluegrass industry that continues to grow in the twenty-first century.

A Recipe for Revival

Rosenberg reminds us that, "In spite of widespread usage of the term, there is no such thing as '*the* folksong revival.' Rather, the musical cultural events described as folksong revivals...happen again and again."[109] Despite its inherent flaws, the term "folk revival" will be used frequently in reference to a loosely defined shift in the American musical landscape that took place in the 1950s and 1960s. As one of this project's major themes, the concept of the revival merits further examination regarding the individuals and communities being discussed herein. While defining revivals has long been a topic of debate in folklore circles, Livingston offers a practical framework for understanding music revivals, characterized "as any social movement with the goal of restoring and preserving a musical tradition which is believed to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past"[110] Livingston proceeds to outline a "basic recipe" for revivals, where "certain ingredients are required but others are up to individual

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[108] Ibid. 210.
[109] Neil V. Rosenberg, "Introduction," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 2.
[110] Tamara E. Livingston, "Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Winter 1999), 68.

discretion, thus making each a unique creation."[111] I will apply this model to the revival activities taking place in the Seattle bluegrass community during the 1960s. Livingston's criteria are as follows:

1. An individual or small group of "core revivalists"
2. Revival informants and/or original sources
3. A revivalist ideology and discourse
4. A group of followers which form the basis of a revivalist community
5. Revivalist activities (organizations, festivals, competitions)
6. Non-profit and/or commercial enterprises catering to the revivalist market[112]

It seems that behind every sustained expression of revival, there stands an individual—or multiple individuals—whose unrelenting energy and visionary leadership prove critical to the revival's success. Livingston identifies this group as "'core revivalists'...who communicate their vision to, and organize, a select group of converts," while creating "a new ethos, musical style, and aesthetic code in accordance with their revivalist ideology and personal preferences, what Rosenberg calls 'transforming the tradition.'"[113] On a national scale, the traditional music community has long recognized Mike Seeger's lifelong dedication to preserving and promoting traditional folk music, and both he and fellow New Lost City Rambler, John Cohen, are mentioned by Livingston as examples of core revivalists within the old time music revival.[114] Malone cites Seeger's "commanding presence in the folk revival," while describing him as a "brilliant musician who devoted well over fifty years of his life to the preservation and commemoration of the music and culture of white and black southerners."[115] Seeger's longtime friends and collaborators, Phil and Vivian Williams, have occupied a similar role in the

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[111] Ibid. 69.
[112] Ibid. 69.
[113] Ibid. 70.
[114] Ibid. 70-71.
[115] Bill C. Malone, *Music from the True Vine Mike Seeger's Life & Musical Journey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 1-6.

traditional music communities of the Pacific Northwest over the same period, providing the focus for much of this project. While their many contributions to traditional music—in the Northwest, and beyond—may not be as well known to the broader community as Seeger's, their life's work has been no less prolific, and warrants the same level of attention.

The next ingredient Livingston identifies are the informants and historical sources, which are critical to "formulating the revival tradition's repertoire, stylistic features, and history."[116] Livingston underscores the role of historical recordings as original sources, drawing from examples in the rockabilly revival of the 1970s and 1980s, the blues revival, and the traditional jazz revival.[117] For folk revival audiences, Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*, "an eccentric compendium of recordings from the 1920s and 1930s that ranged across genres (from hillbilly to blues to gospel to cowboy)," is cited universally, by scholars and musicians alike, for having "inspired countless revivalists to re-create the old-time styles and, in some cases, track down the musicians who had recorded the songs decades before."[118] For many revival-era bluegrass enthusiasts, the two records Mike Seeger curated for the Folkways label—the aforementioned 1957 LP, *American Banjo Scruggs Style*, and the 1959 LP, *Mountain Music Bluegrass Style*—provided their first in-depth exposure to bluegrass music, offering a wealth of material from source musicians.[119] Livingston is careful to point out that revivalists can also be source musicians themselves,[120] as evidenced by revival banjoist Eric Weissberg's inclusion on both Seeger-produced albums. Indeed, these recordings played a critical role in popularizing

[116] Livingston, "Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory," 71.
[117] Ibid. 71.
[118] Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 272.
[119] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 147-153.
[120] Livingston, "Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory," 71.

bluegrass with revival audiences and were among the records passed around in Phil and Vivian's circle of friends.

While Livingston focuses on the importance of recordings as historical sources, individual informants have played a particularly important role in certain areas of the folk revival. Inspired by Harry Smith's *Anthology*, and the prior work of musicologists, such as Alan Lomax and Charles Seeger (Mike's father), the New Lost City Ramblers set the example for old time revivalists early on, as Seeger and Cohen were among a group of avid young collectors and field researchers who set out to discover—or rediscover—traditional musicians in the mountain south, including Dock Boggs, Roscoe Holcomb, and Dillard Chandler.[121] Simultaneously, aspiring young blues guitar players in New York—Stefan Grossman, Andy Cohen, Ernie Hawkins, Jorma Kaukonen, and others—jumped at the opportunity to learn from Reverend Gary Davis, who had relocated there from South Carolina in the 1940s.[122] As the old time branch of the revival progressed, Ray Alden and Alan Jabbour were among the early collectors and musicians to make pilgrimages to the home of Tommy Jarrell, a North Carolina fiddler who "became one of the guiding lights of a new phase of the old-time string band revival."[123] In much the same spirit, Phil and Vivian Williams began visiting Fred McFalls in Darrington, Washington, having been introduced by friend and fellow-musician, Irwin Nash. McFalls and his peers in the Tar Heel music community can be viewed as informants according to Livingston's revival criteria.

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[121] Kip Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music: Ethnic, Grassroots, and Regional Traditions in the United States* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 309-310.
[122] Dick Weissman, *Which Side Are You On: An Inside History of the Folk Music Revival in America* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 196-197.
[123] Malone, *Music from the True Vine Mike Seeger's Life & Musical Journey*, 138-140.

The elevated importance of informants and original sources introduces the concept of authenticity, which lies at the heart of the "ideology and discourse" section of Livingston's revival recipe. "In all music revivals, the most important components for the formation of the aesthetic and ethical code are the ideas of historical continuity and organic purity of the revived practice...It is this characteristic that distinguishes revivals from other musical movements or trends."[124] In fact, this entanglement with authenticity has been a feature of country and bluegrass music since long before revival audiences became involved.

In his thorough examination of the ever-evolving valuations of authenticity in country music, Peterson explains that, as early as Fiddlin' John Carson's recording debut in 1923, "Entertainment industry impresarios sensed that the essential appeal of the music was rooted in the feeling of authenticity conveyed by its performers."[125] Peterson proceeds to identify perceived authenticity as a driving factor in bluegrass music's popularity, first in the 1950s, as an alternative to the amplified guitars and increasingly lush string arrangements found elsewhere in country music, and then in the 1960s, as folk revival audiences began to view "bluegrass as the living link back to older acoustic forms of country and folk music."[126] These observations support another aspect of Livingston's argument, that "'Authentic' music is believed to have been passed on through the generations outside of (or in spite of) mainstream markets."[127]

As Rosenberg points out, the revivalists' exposure to Folkways and Library of Congress recordings—Livingston's "original sources"—directly influenced their acceptance of bluegrass as "authentic" music, separate from other forms of commercial country music in that era. Vivian

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[124] Livingston, "Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory," 74.
[125] Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 5.
[126] Ibid. 213.
[127] Livingston, "Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory," 74.

Williams acknowledged this position during one of our interviews, explaining that she still finds it difficult to define bluegrass music's relationship with other forms of country. However, the concept of authenticity took a new turn during the revival years, as young devotees of traditional music began to place a higher value on learning directly from source musicians—Livingston's "informants." Once again, Mike Seeger provides a classic example, as his "commitment to and seeming mastery of stylistic authenticity"[128]—widely attributed to the personal relationships he established with traditional artists—elevated his standing among his peers. Malone quotes Chris Darrow of the rock band Kaleidoscope, who expressed this sentiment, saying, "If you asked Ry Cooder, if you asked Taj Mahal, if you asked David Lindley, if you asked me, you would all get, 'I wanted to be Mike Seeger.'"[129] Ultimately, these discussions of authenticity are inextricably linked with Livingston's informants and original sources, which go a long way toward outlining the "revivalist ideology and discourse" in this area of the revival.

Seeger and his peers were not above criticism from revival-era folklorists, who questioned the validity of urban, middle-class performers adopting the music of distant, marginalized cultures. In an effort toward categorizing the various participants of the revival, Stekert identified one such group as "imitators," which she later softened to "emulators." "[Emulators] have taken time to learn the skills of those whom they have admired. These [emulators] have found meaning in the traditional songs and style of presentation of the authentic folksingers, and have sought to totally absorb themselves in their chosen style."[130] Having cited Seeger's New Lost City Ramblers as an example, it would follow that most bluegrass, old time, and blues revivalists of the era would be assigned to this group. This stands in contrast to the

[128] Malone, *Music from the True Vine Mike Seeger's Life & Musical Journey*, 114.
[129] Ibid. 114.
[130] Ellen J. Stekert, "Cents and Nonsense in the Urban Folksong Movement: 1930-66," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 96.

"traditional singers...who have learned their songs and their style of presentation from oral tradition as they grew up."[131] Stekert suggests this group typically comes from an impoverished background, including the southern whites and blacks of old-time country and blues traditions. Although this definition does not account for the extent to which "traditional singers" were influenced by mass media sources—records and radio—it is fair to assume that the Tar Heel bluegrassers in Darrington would fall under this category in Stekert's terminology. Identifying the potential for cultural appropriation in the "emulators" relationship to the "traditional singers," Stekert argues that traditional performers "had developed and practiced their art in cultures whose aesthetics and politics were vastly different from those of their more powerful champions," expressing concern "that there was an unacknowledged exploitation and romanticizing of a class of people, the economically 'underprivileged' traditional performers."[132] Rosenberg likewise acknowledges that revivalists "are from a different class and therefore have the power to choose the terms on which they will assimilate" when interacting with Stekert's "traditional singers."[133] While I did not find any evidence that these concerns manifested themselves in the Washington communities I studied, Stekert's thought-provoking work provides greater insight to the discussions of appropriation and authenticity taking place in revival communities at that time.

Other scholars have offered a more favorable evaluation of the relationship between revival performers and the traditional artists that have informed their approach. Arguing against the concept of "tradition" as static or pure, Feintuch maintains that "tradition is a social and academic construct standing for and resulting from an ongoing process of interpreting and

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[131] Ibid. 96.
[132] Ibid. 88.
[133] Rosenberg, "Starvation, Serendipity, and the Ambivalence of Bluegrass Revivalism," 197.

reinterpreting the past."[134] In this light, he proceeds to suggest that, "Rather than castigate folk music revivalists as if they had somehow corrupted what does not belong to them, as some folklorists have tended to do, it seems to me that we should understand folk music revivals as transformations."[135] Blaustein comes to a similar conclusion: "If organically authentic bearers of folk tradition are willing to accept newcomers and outsiders who have come to appreciate and identify with their traditions of expressive culture, then folklorists ought to follow suit and accept the validity and legitimacy of these affinity-based relationships."[136] Considering the vast expanse of the folk revival and its various branches, the skepticism of Stekert and other folklorists, as to the actions and intentions of revivalists, would seem to be well founded. However, when applied to the specifics of this project, involving relationships between people like Fred McFalls and the Williamses, the views of Feintuch and Blaustein seem more applicable to the interactions taking place in Washington's bluegrass community during the revival era.

Much of this project is concerned with documenting the various organizations and expressions of community that allowed the Northwest bluegrass scene to take root, which generally fall under the final three categories of Livingston's criteria. Festivals, competitions, and other group activities "are crucial to the revivalist community because revivalists meet each other face-to-face to share repertoire and playing techniques, to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of artists within the tradition, to actively learn and experience the revivalist ethos and aesthetic code at work, and to socialize among other 'insiders.'"[137] According to Livingston, "These events are fundamental to a revival's success for they supplement what can be learned

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[134] Feintuch, "Music Revival as Musical Transformation," 192.
[135] Ibid. 192.
[136] Richard Blaustein, "Rethinking Folk Revivalism: Grass-roots Preservationism and Folk Romanticism," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 272.
[137] Livingston, "Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory," 73.

from recordings and books with lived experiences and direct human contact."[138] Few institutions better exemplify this principle at work than the gatherings by the fountain in New York's Washington Square Park, which musicians and scholars frequently cite as a major "center for urban folk revivalists" in the 1950s and 1960s.[139] Hordes of folk enthusiasts, whether aspiring musicians or curious listeners, gathered to socialize, exchange ideas, and test their skill without the typical pressures of a formal stage environment. Dan Wakefield described it as "a community scene," while Theodore Bikel remembered it as "an ideal location for folk music," and that "no one played in the Square for any reason except the satisfaction of playing and the honing of musical skills in front of an audience."[140] Bluegrass and string band music became a regular feature at Square gatherings, attracting the likes of Tom Paley, Roger Sprung, Eric Weissberg, and Marshall Brickman.[141] Within Livingston's framework, the gatherings at Washington Square Park reflect both the "revivalist activities" and "group of followers," providing the space—and people—necessary for the community to develop.

Here again, we can identify parallels in the growing Northwest bluegrass community. Early on, the annual Tar Heel picnics at Everett's Forest Park, along with the fiddlers contest at Darrington's Timber Bowl, provided an opportunity for musicians to gather and network, bringing together Darrington's tradition-bearers with Seattle's young revival crowd. Throughout the 1960s, jam sessions and house parties, including those at the McFalls and Williams homes, would fill this role. By the 1970s, Northwest bluegrassers were intermingling in large numbers at annual events, like the National Old Time Fiddlers Contest in Weiser, Idaho, the Northwest Folklife Festival in Seattle, with its "Bluegrass Hill," or the monthly jam sessions held at the

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[138] Ibid. 73.
[139] Weissman, *Which Side Are You On: An Inside History of the Folk Music Revival in America*, 94.
[140] Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival & American Society, 1940-1970*, 106-107.
[141] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 144-145.

Darrington Community Center. Each of these informal social settings allowed musicians to build friendships and explore musical relationships in a low-pressure environment, which was critical to the community's organic growth.

The remaining examples bring us back to Livingston's final ingredient, that of "non-profit and/or commercial enterprises catering to the revivalist market." Recognizing the value of learning directly from traditional artists, John Cohen, Ralph Rinzler, and Izzy Young came together to start a non-profit organization that would bring these performers to revival audiences in New York, which represents another turning point in the revival. Quoted in the summer 1960 issue of *Sing Out!*, Cohen argues, "If the city wants and needs folk music in its soul, then its exchange with country musicians must be a two-way affair. If we feel a desire towards their outlook on music, we must be willing to understand their way of life and to respect them as people who have something to offer in their way."[142] Launched in December 1960, Friends of Old Time Music (FOTM) brought a slew of traditional artists to New York, beginning with Roscoe Holcomb, and continuing with Clarence Ashley, Doc Watson, Bill Monroe, Gus Cannon, Furry Lewis, and many more.[143] As Allen explains, "FOTM brought the sound of raw rural music to New York at a pivotal moment when folk music was blossoming into a national fad and growing numbers of urban players were eagerly searching for authentic roots music untainted by commercialism or artsy affectations."[144] Established with an awareness of FOTM, the Seattle Folklore Society would soon serve in a similar capacity in the Seattle area, bringing many of the same artists to the Pacific Northwest, ranging from Son House and Lightnin' Hopkins, to Buell Kazee and Ralph Stanley.

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[142] Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival & American Society, 1940-1970*, 173.
[143] Ibid. 173.
[144] Ray Allen, "Staging the Folk: New York City's Friends of Old Time Music," *Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter*, Vol. XXXV, No. 2 (Spring 2006), 2.

Among the "commercial enterprises" were brick-and-mortar establishments in the form of music stores and performance venues. According to Weissman, "In every city where the folk revival assumed some importance there seems to have been one or two central places where the impetus for the revival was funneled."[145] He proceeds to identify Izzy Young's Folklore Center as one such place in New York City, which is widely accepted as the headquarters of the postwar folk revival. As a store, it provided access to books, songbooks, instruments, and records for New York's folk enthusiasts, but its service to the community went much further. The Folklore Center became a meeting ground for musicians, fans, record-company personnel, and others interested in networking within the revival community. Young, who was also a concert promoter, became an advocate for local musicians, helping many find side jobs, recommending them to record labels, and connecting them with prospective guitar students.[146] Many parallels can be drawn to Gordon Tracie's aptly-named Folklore Center in Seattle, which provided many of the same critical services to Seattle's folk community during the 1950s and 1960s. Though only mentioned in passing within the scope of this project, Stu Herrick's Folkstore, which he operated from 1977 to 2011, largely picked up where Tracie's Folklore Center left off—even selling the author his first banjo.[147]

One of the places Young presented music was Gerde's Folk City, just outside Greenwich Village. Supportive performance venues have been another critical ingredient to the development of revival artists, and Gerde's was one such space in New York. In addition to tradition-bearers, like Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Gerde's was a proving ground for young talent,

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[145] Weissman, *Which Side Are You On: An Inside History of the Folk Music Revival in America*, 92.
[146] Ibid. 91-93.
[147] Tyrone Beason, "Stuart Herrick: At the Folkstore, he's settled in with songs in his heart," *Pacific NW Magazine* (Seattle), March 30, 2008, https://www.seattletimes.com/pacific-nw-magazine/stuart-herrick-at-the-folkstore-hes-settled-in-with-songs-in-his-heart/.

including a then-unknown Bob Dylan.[148] On the opposite coast, Theodore Bikel "'bemoaned the fact that Los Angeles had no places where folksingers could hang out and sing or play when they felt like it'" [Cohen 118]. Together, he and Herb Cohen opened the Unicorn on Sunset Boulevard, and soon after, Ed Pearl opened the Ash Grove in West Hollywood, which quickly became "the area's liveliest folk venue."[149] Pearl, who had been active with folk-oriented student organizations at UCLA in the mid-1950s, took a strong interest in southern vernacular music, presenting traditional performers, while nurturing the careers of future stars, including Linda Ronstadt, Taj Mahal, and Ry Cooder.[150] Though it did not play a major role in Seattle's music community until the 1970s, the Inside Passage, located in Pioneer Square, offered a similar utility to the city's growing bluegrass community. Many of the area's young bluegrass bands honed their chops onstage at the Passage, which featured bluegrass on a weekly basis.

Perhaps as critical as any other commercial ingredient are the independent, folk-oriented record labels. They have played an essential role in sparking the postwar revival, by introducing urban audiences to various forms of traditional music, and by providing opportunities for young artists to deliver their music to the world—opportunities not often found on the larger, more financially-driven labels. Moe Asch's Folkways was at the forefront of the revival, sparking a "big bang," of sorts, when they released Harry Smith's six-LP collection of carefully-curated 78rpm recordings as *The Anthology of American Folk Music* in 1952.[151] Later in the decade, *American Banjo Scruggs Style* and *Mountain Music Bluegrass Style* were among the Folkways releases that introduced bluegrass to revival audiences. Also, a recording platform for revival artists, Folkways spurred the traditional side of the folk music revival with their release of the

[148] Weissman, *Which Side Are You On: An Inside History of the Folk Music Revival in America*, 92-93.
[149] Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival & American Society, 1940-1970*, 153.
[150] Ibid. 119, 287.
[151] Weissman, *Which Side Are You On: An Inside History of the Folk Music Revival in America*, 86-87.

New Lost City Ramblers' debut, in 1958, and further cemented bluegrass as a revival genre with the Country Gentlemen's debut LP, *Country Songs, Old and New,* in 1960.[152]

New York-based Elektra Records was another independent label that focused on traditional artists, as well as younger practitioners. Weissman cites two important releases for the different roles they played in the folk revival. First, Jean Ritchie and her 1952 album, *Singing the Traditional Songs of Her Kentucky Mountain Family*, which "reminded urban revivalists that there was indeed an actual folk community where songs were learned within families and communities."[153] Second, Tom Paley's *Folk Songs of the Southern Appalachian Mountains,* released in 1953. Weissman describes Paley as "typical of many young revivalists in the sense that his singing was secondary to his extraordinary instrumental abilities," and cites his background as a mathematics professor at Yale—in sharp contrast to the rural Kentucky-born Ritchie.[154] In many ways, Paley, who continued to have a major impact as a founding member of the New Lost City Ramblers, serves as the model that many young revivalists would emulate, coming from varied backgrounds themselves.

Chris Strachwitz and Arhoolie Records, based in Berkeley, California, demonstrate the independent folk label's utility in not only introducing traditional music and promoting young revivalists, but locating and recording traditional artists long lost to the public spotlight, or previously unrecorded altogether. Cohen cites the release of The Anthology of American Folk Music as a major impetus for northern revivalists, who "began hunting up and recording rural bluesmen, many of whom had last recorded thirty years earlier."[155] While the likes of the New Lost City Ramblers' Seeger and Cohen were embarking on similar endeavors in southern

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[152] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 158.
[153] Weissman, *Which Side Are You On: An Inside History of the Folk Music Revival in America*, 89.
[154] Ibid. 89.
[155] Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival & American Society, 1940-1970*, 174.

Appalachia, Chris Strachwitz—heavily influenced by the publication of Sam Charters' *The Country Blues*, in 1959—turned his sights on Texas, where he met Lightnin' Hopkins, and recorded Black Ace, Melvin "L'il Son" Jackson, and a previously unknown Mance Lipscomb. The trip resulted in Lipscomb's ensuing album, *Texas Sharecropper and Songster*, released by Arhoolie in 1960, which launched the careers of both Lipscomb and Strachwitz.[156]

Though revival audiences across the country were heavily influenced by Folkways, Elektra, Arhoolie, and other peer labels, smaller regional labels proved significant to revival outposts like Seattle. Phil and Vivian Williams' Voyager Recordings covered many of the same roles in the Seattle folk and traditional music community. Their second release, *Comin' Round the Mountain: Old Time Southern Singing and Playing in Western Washington*, introduced western Washington listeners to the traditional music hidden in their own backyard, while subsequent releases would highlight a number of previously-unrecorded Northwest fiddlers.[157] At the same time, their catalog features a variety of younger artists, including several of their own projects, while reintroducing listeners to the likes of Benny Thomasson and Harley Bray, each of whom had thought their playing days were essentially over once they relocated to the Pacific Northwest.[158]

As demonstrated above, and reinforced in the following pages, Livingston's "recipe" for revival provides a convenient framework for identifying, categorizing, and understanding revival activities. Each "ingredient" can be found in the bluegrass-focused branch of the folk revival taking place in Seattle during the 1960s, reflecting parallel expressions of revival happening on a

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[156] Ibid. 174-175.
[157] "Catalog of Compact Discs: Traditional Fiddle, Dance, and String Band Music," Voyager Recordings & Publications, accessed May 17, 2021, https://www.voyagerrecords.com/cd_cass.htm.
[158] Vivian Williams, interview by author, Seattle, January 4 and 11, 2018; Harley Bray, interview by author, Edmonds, January 5, 2018.

national scale. By considering how the various "ingredients" of Seattle's revival community fit Livingston's framework, we can better understand how the area's contemporary bluegrass scene was started and how it has been maintained as a sustainable community.

Exploring Community Relationships

Where Livingston's "recipe" framework provides a useful tool for analyzing the folk revival, from national and local perspectives, Shelemay's analysis of musical community allows for a better understanding of the dynamics at play in the communities being explored here. Shelemay explains that, "Rethinking the notion of community opens opportunities first and foremost to explore musical transmission and performance not just as expressions or symbols of a given social grouping, but as an integral part of processes that can at different moments help generate, shape, and sustain new collectivities."[159] This conforms with the purpose of this project to not only describe the "expressions or symbols" of the Tar Heel bluegrass or Seattle revival communities, but to consider the ways "musical transmission and performance…help generate, shape, and sustain new collectivities;" in this case, a lasting bluegrass community in western Washington.

In surveying the ways community study has evolved in musical scholarship, Shelemay cites Cohen's *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, which describes community "as a mode of experience that has meaning to people who consider themselves to be part of it. According to Cohen, a community is 'a matter of feeling, a matter which resides in the minds of the members themselves' and is based on sharing of particular symbols."[160] This particular understanding of

[159] Kay Kaufman Shelemay, "Musical Communities: Rethinking the Collective in Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (Summer 2011), 349-350.
[160] Ibid. 358.

community resonates especially well in a musical context, where members share a variety of symbols, including musical performance, as Shelemay notes, as well as styles of dress, and in the case of Washington's Tar Heel bluegrass community, a shared geo-cultural background.

Acknowledging the wide-ranging definitions of community, Shelemay explains how music scholars have pursued alternate terminology to better express their ideas. "Music scene" is the most widely used of these terms, defined by Straw as "'that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization.'"[161] While Cohen's definition of community could describe a tightly-defined group, like the Tar Heel bluegrassers, or a broadly-defined group, like the bluegrass community at large, Straw's concept of scene fits well with the western Washington bluegrass community that resulted from the convergence of the Tar Heels and Seattle revivalists. In this scene, we have a "range of musical practices" and various examples of "cross-fertilization," involving not only musical style, but widely varying cultural and geographic backgrounds.

Shelemay proposes a three-part framework for understanding musical communities, using the terms descent, dissent, and affinity to identify the different processes that generate community. The first of these, "descent communities," are "united through what are understood from within to be shared identities, whether they are grounded in historical fact, are newly invented, or emerge from some combination of historical circumstance and creative transformation."[162] This version of community applies neatly to the Tar Heel bluegrass community in Darrington. Most members of this group share a similar cultural and geographical background, tracing back to western North Carolina, as well as shared experiences that include

[161] Ibid. 359-362.
[162] Ibid. 367.

the process of migration and involvement with the timber industry. Some members, having migrated from other southern states—including Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee—may be included as well, a result of the shared "historical circumstance" of migration from a common region. Shelemay underscores the role of music "in the process of community formation to establish, maintain, and reinforce that collective identity," while suggesting "that descent communities would have been unable to sustain themselves over time were it not for these musical practices."[163] This evaluation is supported by my interviews with Tar Heel community members, who emphasized the importance of music as an important linking factor and socializing tool. The central role of music at the annual Tar Heel picnics exemplifies this, with the picnics serving as both a reunion for longtime community members, and an introductory point for new members. Shelemay builds on this concept, explaining that "music can also provide avenues to penetrate these social boundaries and to bring new constituencies into the fold."[164] This is witnessed by the acceptance of Phil and Vivian Williams, Irwin Nash, and others, by the Tar Heel bluegrass community, and especially the McFalls family, during their frequent house jams.

"Dissent communities," as the title implies, are based in opposition, and "generally emerge through acts of resistance against an existing collectivity" [Shelemay 370]. Shelemay cites the folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s as a classic example of this. For some, the revival represented "dissent" from the prevailing political ideology, while others "viewed folk music as a bucolic escape from the pressures of the modern world and a return to traditional American values" [Lornell 284]. As part of the Seattle revival community, Vivian Williams confirmed "dissent" as a driving factor in her attraction to folk and traditional music, having been raised

[163] Ibid. 368.
[164] Ibid. 368.

with a healthy aversion to mainstream American music. While this may partly explain the desire to seek out alternatives to contemporary pop music, I would argue that Shelemay's final grouping better illustrates the resulting focus on bluegrass.

The third category Shelemay outlines is the "affinity" community, which "emerges first and foremost from individual preferences, quickly followed by a desire for social proximity or association with others equally enamored."[165] If the Tar Heel bluegrass community could be described as a community of "descent," and aspects of the Seattle revival community as being founded in "dissent," the term "affinity" applies well to the bluegrass community that developed as a result of these groups coming together. Shelemay explains that "affinity communities derive their strength from the presence and proximity of a sizeable group and for the sense of belonging and prestige that this affiliation offers."[166] The outgrowth of social gatherings that traced the development of the Northwest bluegrass scene in its early years, from house jams to large festivals, provided the opportunity for the community to grow organically by means of affinity. The "conversion experience" is another aspect of affinity cited by Shelemay, allowing "that a chance encounter can spark a lifelong engagement with a musical tradition not otherwise part of an individual's purview."[167] For many, the bluegrass "conversion experience" took the form of a record or radio broadcast, or a chance meeting with someone who played banjo. For others, their conversion took place at a live performance. Mike Seeger, who was already familiar with Scruggs-style banjo, as played by Roger Sprung, testifies to the power of live bluegrass in his early awakening: "'In 1952 I first heard Lester [Flatt] and Earl [Scruggs] out at the country music park not far from where I live now. Incredible! It was like a religious experience.'"[168] In

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[165] Ibid. 373.
[166] Ibid. 373.
[167] Ibid. 373.
[168] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 147.

the section focusing on the 1950s Seattle Folk Scene, Vivian Williams tells of Tall Timber bandmate, Dick Marvin, whose conversion experience came when he heard Don Reno and Arthur Smith's "Feudin' Banjos" on the car radio as he was driving down the road.

As Shelemay is careful to point out, this framework "is not intended to be prescriptive, but rather to serve as an analytical tool, one that tracks both social/musical relationships and their outcomes…Any given community may contain elements of the three categories."[169] Of course, the same can be said of Livingston's revival "recipe." Both are used here as a way of illustrating various ways the folk music revival influenced the direction of bluegrass and traditional music communities, regionally and nationally. In the following pages, these connections and observations may serve as a backdrop to the early history of Washington bluegrass, from its roots in Darrington, to its arrival in Seattle, focusing on many of the people who were involved along the way.

[169] Shelemay, "Musical Communities: Rethinking the Collective in Music," 378-379.

CHAPTER 4. BLUEGRASS TAKES ROOT IN THE NORTHWEST

> *If the terrain were a little less savage, the air a little wispier, the trees hardwood instead of fir, cedar and vine maple, it could be North Carolina, along the foggy periphery of the Great Smokies. You climb higher. The road twists like a fleeing garter snake. The canyons grow wilder and steeper, the stump ranches look more forlorn. Then the hulk of Whitehorse Mountain blocks out the horizon, hanging over the town below like a malign fang.*
>
> *You are in Darrington, Wash., population 1,182. You are also, more or less, back in North Carolina.*[170]

Fred McFalls was one of the many young men who came to western Washington seeking opportunity in the rich evergreen forests of the Cascade Mountains. The timber industry was still booming there in the years following World War II, offering the glimmering hope of prosperity to a significant stream of migrants from the Appalachian South and other parts of the country that struggled with sustained economic hardship. While most Southern migrants looked to the industrial centers of the upper Midwest for a change in fortune, Fred followed a lesser-travelled path to the vast forests of the Pacific Northwest, which had provided an outlet for displaced Southerners since before the turn of the century.

The pattern of chain migration that saw many Jackson County, North Carolina residents relocate to western Washington was already in full effect post-World War II, but with none of Fred's immediate family members having made the move, the McFalls family isn't sure what sparked his interest in Washington, nearly 3,000 miles from home.[171] Possibly, enough friends and neighbors had moved west that Fred trusted he could find community there. In any case, with the Northwest timber industry in full swing, Fred had heard that money was almost literally

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[170] Bob Houston, "That Good Old Mountain Soul," *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, November 16, 1969, NewspaperArchive.
[171] Janie McFalls-Bertalan, telephone conversation with author, February 9, 2018.

growing on trees, so sometime in 1949 or 1950, he and a friend from North Carolina loaded into an old pickup truck and drove west.[172] His arrival ultimately sparked the beginning of a robust bluegrass music community in the far reaches of the Pacific Northwest.

In the Shadow of Whitehorse

Darrington, Washington remains a small mountain town, its natural beauty intact as a gateway to the North Cascades. The dominating presence of Whitehorse—named for the equine-shaped glacier on the mountain's north face—towers above town to the southwest; the clear waters of the Stillaguamish and Sauk rivers establish boundaries to the west and east, respectively. Yet the ebb and flow of natural resource extraction, that so frequently determines the fate of rural communities, eventually caught up with Darrington, just as it had in western North Carolina decades prior. The parade of log trucks that once shuttled along the Arlington-Darrington highway has largely subsided, the town relying more heavily on tourist draws in the form of outdoor recreation and music festivals. In contrast, the mid-century Darrington that Fred McFalls encountered upon his arrival was riding a postwar surge, still humming with the din of lumber mills.

Originally settled with intent to develop mineral resources, Darrington's economy quickly began turning toward the forests with the arrival of the railroad at the turn of the century.[173] Initially, small lumber mills and shingle mills generated the great majority of the town's income, but as the United States Forest Service opened larger tracts of land for resource development in the 1910s and 1920s, the timber industry hit its stride, and Darrington entered its

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[172] Ibid.
[173] Poehlman, *Darrington: Mining Town/Timber Town*, 57-61.

logging heyday. This era saw the first waves of Tar Heels emigrate west from North Carolina, with one mill in the neighboring Skagit Valley recruiting three railcar loads of workers in the early 1920s, covering the cost of transportation, and providing housing for families upon arrival.[174]

Surrounded by towering forests rich in fir, hemlock, and cedar, loggers used crosscut hand saws to fell four- to nine-foot diameter firs, and sixteen- to seventeen-foot cedars. By the late 1920s, the Sauk River Lumber Company was loading over a million board feet of timber every other day, employing nearly 300 men in its movable logging camp. Darrington's economy had become almost entirely dependent on the timber industry when the Great Depression took hold, and like much of the rest of the country, struggled for several years to regain its footing.[175]

By the postwar years of the late 1940s, traditional large-scale logging camps had been displaced by the greater maneuverability of truck logging. This opened the door for small-scale, independent outfits, who frequently contracted with larger companies like Scott, Weyerhaeuser, and Georgia-Pacific, earning a certain amount per thousand board feet of timber harvested. During the height of truck logging in the 1950s and 1960s, dozens of trucks could be heard shuttling logs in and around Darrington on a daily basis. Many loads ended up at the Three Rivers Mill in Darrington, which was taken over by the Summit Timber Company in 1959.[176] The Summit Mill became Darrington's largest employer, with approximately 300 workers in 1974,[177] and remains so today under the ownership of Hampton Lumber Company,[178] despite the continued fluctuations of the timber industry.

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[174] Ibid. 145-150.
[175] Ibid. 145-154.
[176] Ibid. 165-169.
[177] Ibid. 170.
[178] "Darrington, Washington: The Ideal Location for Enjoying the Outdoors," Hampton Lumber, accessed March 27, 2021, https://www.hamptonlumber.com/communities/darrington/.

The McFalls Family

When I first began researching the history of bluegrass music in the Pacific Northwest, the late Phil Williams emphasized the role of Fred McFalls and his wife, Alice, as the "de facto leaders" of the Tar Heel bluegrass community, emanating from Darrington, Washington.[179] Subsequent conversations with Phil's wife, Vivian Williams, and Irwin Nash, each of whom played critical roles in developing the bluegrass community in Washington State, only served to underscore Phil's proclamation. Though Fred was not the first North Carolinian to bring his musical talents to western Washington, he is widely acknowledged for founding the first professional bluegrass band in the region, the Carolina Mountain Boys, while also being recognized as the area's top bluegrass-style banjo player in his day. Additionally, he and Alice opened their home to a growing number of young, would-be bluegrassers, who were branching out from the greater Seattle folk scene of the 1950s and 1960s, fostering the growth of a thriving bluegrass community far beyond the town limits of Darrington.

Like many of the self-identified Tar Heels that settled in Darrington, Fred McFalls grew up in rural Jackson County, North Carolina, nestled in the Great Balsam Mountains, a subrange near the southern end of the greater Blue Ridge province. Fred was raised on a family farm in Caney Fork, a small community near Cullowhee and the town of Sylva. "They were out on a mountain," says daughter Janie McFalls-Bertalan, "and they all kind of just lived in the same area. It was way out in the sticks, where he grew up." Though he only attended school through the third grade, Fred was a motivated learner. It wasn't until later in life that he began to seriously read, which he learned by methodically working his way through the family Bible.[180]

[179] Phil Williams, email to author, October 5, 2016.
[180] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.

Having joined the Army at the onset of World War II, Fred was sent to basic training at Fort Jackson (South Carolina) in February of 1942.[181] Ultimately serving in the European theater during the war, a news clipping back home, dated March 28, 1945, highlighted his contributions in the final weeks before Germany's unconditional surrender: "Pfc. Fred McFalls, Gunner, son of Mrs. Timey McFalls, of Cowarts, is a member of the 173rd Field Artillery Battalion, which recently fired its 110,000th round into German positions on the Fifth Army front in Italy."[182] At the end of the war, Fred returned to western North Carolina, and like many in the area, had a difficult time finding consistent work, ultimately prompting his move to Washington.[183]

In 1952, now living in Darrington, Fred found himself driving past Alice Potts' home while she was out working in the yard. Recounting their meeting, Fred was sure to tell everyone that "she about jumped the fence to get out there to talk to him."[184] Shortly thereafter, in July of 1952, Fred and Alice were married during a small ceremony at Alice's parents' home in Darrington. They celebrated that evening by attending the stock car races in Seattle with friends and family.[185]

A fellow Tar Heel, Alice grew up in Franklin, North Carolina,[186] later moving to Sylva, where her father had taken over the newly renovated Central Esso Station.[187] Prior to their move, Mr. Potts had operated the Lake View Service Station[188] and Tick-Tock Cafe in Franklin,[189]

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[181] "Jackson Sends Thirty Men to Fort Jackson," *Jackson County Journal*, February 19, 1942, North Carolina Newspapers.
[182] "Jackson Boy in Outfit That Fires 110,000th Round Into German Ranks," *Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, March 28, 1945, North Carolina Newspapers.
[183] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Mrs. Horace Enyeart, "Darrington," *Arlington Times*, July 17, 1952, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of Stillaguamish Valley Pioneers.
[186] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.
[187] "Station Renovated," *Sylva Herald and Ruralite*, March 22, 1944, North Carolina Newspapers.
[188] [Untitled], *Franklin Press and the Highlands Maconian*, March 28, 1940, North Carolina Newspapers.
[189] "Clyde Sanders Buys Tick-Tock Cafe," *Franklin Press and the Highlands Maconian*, December 3, 1942, North Carolina Newspapers.

where Alice and her sister Esther worked while growing up. Having completed school through the eleventh grade, Alice married Neil Bishop, Jr., in September 1946, and moved to Washington shortly thereafter, where their first child, Jo Ann, was born in Arlington. She was pregnant with their second child, Roger, when Neil passed away at the age of 24.[190]

With the timber industry being the focus of the economy in Darrington, Fred earned his living as a millworker, primarily on the "green team," where he inspected and pulled bad lumber. By the mid-1960s, a significant portion of the mill was being shut down, and Fred found work at an Everett plywood mill along with two of his friends, who would take turns driving the 100-mile round trip from Darrington each day.[191] Strategically situated along Puget Sound, Everett has historically been one of Washington's busiest ports for the processing and shipping of forest products.

In 1965, Fred moved the family to nearby Marysville to be closer to his job. Janie was in the fifth grade at the time of the move and ended up finishing high school in Marysville. By 1972, the mill in Everett shut down, and the McFalls family moved to Sandpoint, Idaho, where Fred had planned to open a shake mill with two of his friends from the Skagit Valley. The plan ultimately fell through, and after a few months in Sandpoint, the family moved on to Libby, Montana. Finding work in Libby proved difficult for Fred, but he eventually hired on at a lumber mill, before moving back to Marysville in 1975. The family returned to the same house they had left three years earlier, having rented it out while they were gone, rather than sell. At this point in his life, Fred transitioned away from millwork, instead picking up janitorial work for area schools.[192]

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[190] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid.

Together, Fred and Alice McFalls would become two of the central figures responsible for establishing a lasting bluegrass music community in Washington State. Fred, as one of the first to perform bluegrass professionally in the state, and eventual mentor to a younger generation of aspiring bluegrass musicians from Seattle; Alice, as gracious host, who welcomed the music in her home, and stood as a shining example of southern—or Tar Heel—hospitality. Alice, in particular, deserves recognition for the often-unseen roles women perform in building bluegrass community, evidenced by her frequent mention during the portions of interviews that dealt with jam sessions at the McFalls' home. Additionally, Fred and Alice lent their efforts to organizations that would help foster the growth of a bluegrass community in Washington, namely the Timber Bowl event in Darrington and the Tar Heel picnic held every summer in Everett.

Fred and Ben

While Fred was growing up in North Carolina, music was not a major part of the McFalls household. Neither his mother nor his brothers played music, and while his stepfather "had a little bit of music in him," according to Fred's daughter, Janie, he did not keep any musical instruments around the house. Eventually, Fred became proficient enough on the guitar that he began playing in a classic brother-style duo with Ben Bryson, a fellow North Carolinian, who played mandolin. Though Janie doesn't recall Fred saying much about his experiences playing music prior to moving to Washington, he and Ben must have had at least some level of

professional ambition, as they made appearances on local radio out of Waynesville, North Carolina.[193]

Fortunately, we don't have to strain ourselves wondering what Fred and Ben may have sounded like during their early years as a duo. Approximately twenty-five minutes of rare video footage has been preserved for public viewing, an invaluable record of these two pioneering figures in Washington's Tar Heel bluegrass community. Filmed in the 1960s at the University of Washington, in collaboration between the Seattle Folklore Society and KCTS Channel 9, the opening lines read, "Originally from Sylva, North Carolina, Fred McFalls and Ben Bryson now live in northwestern Washington. Together with a fiddler, they formed the Carolina Mountain Boys and played on the radio in Waynesville, North Carolina during the 1940s."[194] The camera then cuts abruptly to a close-up of Fred, who introduces an old standard, "The Greenback Dollar," while Ben prepares to kick it off on his borrowed Gibson F-5 mandolin.

Appearing in matching suits and western bow ties, Fred with his thatch of thick, dark hair neatly slicked back, the duo evokes the professional brother duets of the 1930s. The program continues with two more classic duet arrangements: "Lonely Tombs" and "All the Good Times are Past and Gone." Ben sings the tenor parts, and Fred handles the lead vocals, providing steady rhythm and snappy bass runs on his Martin D-28. Noted especially for his three-finger banjo playing, he then switches over to a Gibson Mastertone, rendering strong performances of "Maggie Blues" and "Double Banjo Blues," a nod to his banjo hero, Don Reno.[195] Their sound bears resemblance to fellow western North Carolinians, the Morris Brothers, who were active on

[193] Ibid.
[194] Blues&Folk 1960's, "Fred McFalls pt 1," April 8, 2011, video, 12:59, https://youtu.be/kcAKze6tK_k.
[195] Blues&Folk 1960's, "Fred McFalls pt 2," April 8, 2011, video, 12:02, https://youtu.be/g8k-4fWHarU.

Asheville, North Carolina's WWNC radio in the late 1930s,[196] when Fred and Ben were still living in nearby Jackson County.

This footage first became known to me as an undergraduate student in 2011, when it was uploaded to YouTube, alongside similar in-studio performances from Roscoe Holcomb, Buell Kazee, Elizabeth Cotton, and several others, each sponsored by the Seattle Folklore Society. At the time, I was studying bluegrass and old-time music at East Tennessee State University, eventually honing my focus on the brother acts that began appearing in the 1930s. Discovering this footage of Fred and Ben was revelatory for me, not only as a recent transplant from the Pacific Northwest, but as a student of this lightly documented subgenre of country music. By the time television overtook radio as the dominant form of media in the 1950s, most of the classic brother duos had either faded into obscurity, or evolved within the arc of country music, incorporating larger bands, and the modern sounds of honkytonk, bluegrass, and rhythm and blues. As such, there are precious few examples of the brother duet style committed to film, greatly enhancing the value of this footage, aside from its import as an artifact of early country and bluegrass music in Washington State.

The Carolina Mountain Boys

The Carolina Mountain Boys are considered by many to be the first professional bluegrass band in western Washington, having formed sometime in the early 1950s, after Fred McFalls moved to Darrington from western North Carolina. Built around Fred's polished banjo playing, the initial lineup also featured brothers Kenneth and Pritch Chastain on guitars, with Bill

[196] Wayne Erbsen, "Wiley & Zeke: The Morris Brothers," *Bluegrass Unlimited*, August 1980, 48-49.

O'Connor joining on fiddle.[197] All were originally from western North Carolina. Frankie D. Kannard, a highly skilled fiddle and banjo player, also played with the band during this time, prior to finding fame as "Buster Jenkins" on radio station KLAK's Rocky Mountain Jamboree out of Denver, Colorado.[198]

Up to this point, newspaper records have revealed little about the performances given by the Carolina Mountain Boys during the 1950s. As such, it is difficult to infer much about the frequency or variety of their typical appearances, or for that matter, the evolution of their lineup over the years. With that said, it is probably safe to assume they would have been called upon to play similar events and venues as their immediate predecessors, the Sauk River Ramblers, who will be addressed in the proceeding pages. This would have included various community functions, such as Darrington's annual Timber Bowl parade, along with weekend dances at some of the area grange halls.

Fred's daughter, Janie, highlighted some of the more memorable engagements the Carolina Mountain Boys were involved with during these early years. Once or twice, they appeared on Buck Owens' Saturday night television show, The Bar-K Jamboree, a half-hour program on Tacoma's channel 11, KTNT.[199] They also filled in with a young Loretta Lynn, who was just beginning her career in the taverns and grange halls of Whatcom County, in Washington's northwest corner. "They used to have picking a lot up there, because there was a lot of...Tar Heels that ended up in that area, in the Sedro-Woolley, Birdsview, Lyman, Concrete, Hamilton [areas]—up in there."[200]

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[197] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.
[198] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone; "Buster Jenkins and the Blue Grass Group," Hillbilly-Music.com, accessed March 18, 2021, http://www.hillbilly-music.com/artists/story/index.php?id=13173.
[199] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone; Eileen Sisk, *Buck Owens: The Biography* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2010), 34.
[200] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.

The Chastain brothers, like Fred, had come to Washington, "to see what it was about," Janie told me. While Fred's ability to travel long distances with the Carolina Mountain Boys was limited by work and family, the Chastains sought to play more widely in the region, as far away as Montana. Bill O'Connor was also active with other groups at this time, and along with the Chastains, began taking out-of-state gigs as opportunities arose. With this, the early incarnation of the Carolina Mountain Boys began to dissolve, and the Chastain brothers eventually moved back to North Carolina, before the young bluegrassers from Seattle became involved with the Darrington music community.[201]

Fred kept the Carolina Mountain Boys going into the 1960s, never lacking for other musicians to play with. He continued to make music with his friend, Ben Bryson, a carryover from his days in North Carolina. Janie told me Ben was not officially a member of the early Carolina Mountain Boys,[202] but Seattle musician, Irwin Nash, remembers seeing Ben perform with Fred and the Chastain brothers in the 1950s,[203] likely at the grand opening celebration for The Folklore Center in Seattle's University District.[204]

Newspaper accounts shed light on some of the other area musicians that Fred performed with in the late 1950s and early 1960s. A July 1959 announcement for a "Western Music Concert" at Darrington High School lists Fred McFalls, Bill O'Connor, and Billy Joe Davis as one of the groups performing, citing their earlier appearance on Bill and Grover's Variety Show, which aired on the same Tacoma television station as Buck Owens' program.[205] Ben Bryson and Val Crawford are also listed among "The local western music stars," participating in the

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[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Irwin Nash, interview by author, Seattle, January 11, 2018.
[204] Williams, interview.
[205] Ace Comstock, "Darrington News: Western Music Concert Friday Night," *Arlington Times*, July 30, 1959, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of Stillaguamish Valley Pioneers; Del Halterman, *Walk—Don't Run: The Story of the Ventures* (Morrisville: Lulu.com, 2009), 20.

Darrington concert, which was to include, "the best in guitar, mandolin, fiddle, and vocal efforts."[206] In 1963, the Carolina Mountain Boys were awarded second place string band in the Darrington Timber Bowl fiddlers' convention, of which Fred was a principal organizer. Their lineup that day included Fred on banjo, Chuck Martin of Lynden on mandolin, Ed Blanton of Darrington on guitar, and Duane Devaney of Bellingham, also on guitar,[207]

Between 1963 and 1964, Phil and Vivian Williams recorded live performances of Fred McFalls and the Carolina Mountain Boys at the Darrington Timber Bowl, as well as a performance hall in Sedro-Woolley that would occasionally host informal bluegrass concerts.[208] From these recordings, two 45 RPM records were produced on a small Seattle record label, Audio Recording Inc., which specialized in affordable, custom pressings for regional performers.[209] Record number AR-107 featured "Pike County Breakdown" on the A-side, paired with "Lonesome Road Blues" on the B-side, while AR-109 included "Paul and Silas" and "Light At The River." According to the label on AR-107, the band was comprised of Fred on banjo, Chuck Martin on mandolin, Ben Bryson on guitar and vocal, with Phil Williams ("Pike County Breakdown") or Ed Blanton ("Lonesome Road Blues") on bass.[210] These appear to be the only semi-commercial records the Carolina Mountain Boys ever made.

As the McFalls children grew older, they began singing and playing instruments themselves. Rather than take formal lessons, they mostly learned by ear, and by watching the grown-ups play during the frequent jam sessions that would take over the McFalls household.

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[206] Comstock, "Darrington News: Western Music Concert Friday Night."
[207] "In Darrington: Timber Bowl Draws Large Crowd," *Arlington Times*, July 4, 1963, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[208] "Preliminary Inventory, Accession CA6217: Phil and Vivian Williams Collection," State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, accessed March 16, 2021, https://files.shsmo.org/manuscripts/columbia/CA6217.pdf.
[209] "Audio Recording Inc.," Northwest Music Archives Discography & Labelography, accessed March 17, 2021, http://nwmusicarchives.com/label/audio-records/.
[210] "Audio Recording, Seattle," Discogs, accessed March 17, 2021, https://www.discogs.com/label/450536-Audio-Recording-Seattle.

"You'd just have to sit and watch everybody's hands, and that's how I picked up the guitar," Janie told me. "Dad wouldn't let us touch the instruments. You know, they were [expensive]. So, I would just watch one chord at a time, and that's how I ended up getting the guitar down a bit."[211] By early 1970s, as the family navigated moves to Idaho, Montana, and back to Marysville, Fred began to redirect his musical efforts toward their family band, Fred's Home Grown. Among their notable gigs were appearances at the Spokane World's Fair in 1974,[212] and the Darrington Bluegrass Festival, from its inception in 1977, through the mid-1980s.[213] With the kids growing up and starting their own families, Fred's Home Grown eventually ran its course.

Pickin' the Banjo

For Janie and the other McFalls kids, bluegrass music and the bright, syncopated rolls of Fred's banjo were part of their everyday lives, growing up in Darrington. "When [Mom] was able to get away from us kids and go grocery shopping with one of her friends...Dad would pick us all to sleep. So, when she'd come home, [we] would be laying all around, asleep, because he would pull out the banjo and just start pickin'."[214]

Though he played multiple instruments, Fred McFalls is most often remembered for his banjo playing. Second generation Tar Heel, Rich Jones, who would become one of the region's finest banjo players in his own right, spent many hours in Fred's living room, each taking turns on banjo, while the other provided accompaniment on guitar.[215] Phil Williams, Irwin Nash, and

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[211] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.
[212] Harley Worthington, interview by author, Everett, January 12, 2018.
[213] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Richard Jones, interview by author, Mt. Vernon, January 12, 2018.

other aspiring musicians from western Washington also sought out Fred's guidance on the banjo, and all things bluegrass, holding his playing in the highest regard.

"Fred was by far the best banjo player [on the regional scene]," explained Irwin Nash, who was one of the first Seattle bluegrass enthusiasts to begin visiting McFalls in Darrington. "Nothing fancy, but superb in terms of old, classic-style bluegrass. Really, really good. He could [also] do some down-picking—he would do 'Little Birdie.' I would bug him to do that."[216] Fred developed a unique approach to the instrument, having taught himself at age thirty-three, after his move to Washington. He knew how to play guitar from his days in North Carolina, playing in a duo with close friend, Ben Bryson. Daughter Janie emphasized to me that Fred was driven to learn, and "taught himself a lot of talents" over the years.[217] This natural curiosity and motivation to pick up new skills, combined with Fred's prior music background, allowed him to excel on the banjo, which he began playing professionally with the Carolina Mountain Boys within a short amount of time.

"Sometimes [Fred] would have to work a double shift at the mill up there in Darrington," says Janie, "And he would get a lick—a roll, or something like that—in his head—of a tune that he was trying to figure out. And so, he would get it figured out in his head, and then he'd come home and he would just [play it] over and over and over again. Of course, it didn't bother us kids...it was just a repetitious thing, and that's how he taught himself with the banjo—the Earl Scruggs three-finger style." Fred learned most of his repertoire from records, rather than the oral tradition or so-called "folk process." He would play a record, listening closely and repeatedly in order to fully internalize the intricate rolls and arpeggios that distinguish bluegrass banjo playing from some of the earlier old-time styles. "That was his challenge—was the three-finger style. But

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[216] Nash, interview.
[217] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.

he got it. Like I said, he would run the tune over and over again in his head when he was working, and then he'd come home and he'd work it out on the banjo."[218]

"Fred was incredibly good," Irwin Nash emphasized, noting that Fred first began playing in a two-finger style, before progressing to three. "He played in an interesting way. He picked straight across, hardly moved his fingers, and it was a very delicate sound. Solid, but not—sort of the antithesis of the way Rudy Lyle played. Light, but flowing, with a lot of feeling. Really, really good."[219] Vivian Williams, whose husband Phil modeled his own approach to the banjo after Fred, further addressed the individuality of Fred's style. "Fred's banjo playing was—I mean, it didn't sound anything like Earl Scruggs or Don Reno, even though Fred thought Earl Scruggs and Don Reno were, you know, the center of the universe. It was very much based on a two-finger kind of a thing, you know, and the syncopation patterns were just a little different."[220]

Janie mentioned Earl Scruggs and Snuffy Jenkins as influences, but Don Reno was Fred's favorite banjo player. There were always a lot of Reno and Smiley records in the McFalls household. Reno's "Double Banjo Blues" was a favorite tune of Fred's, and one that Irwin Nash always enjoyed hearing Fred play when he would visit the McFalls family in Darrington. Fred had it pretty well mastered. While some younger players began exploring new territory on the instrument, Fred held a clear preference for the style pioneered by Scruggs, Reno, and others from bluegrass music's first generation, Janie explained. "Dad didn't like that 'chromatic stuff,' [as] he called it, so he just stayed with the simpler stuff rather than…[the] chromatic stuff [that] goes off into left field, and...doesn't even sound like the song anymore."[221]

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[218] Ibid.
[219] Nash, interview.
[220] Williams, interview.
[221] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.

As of this writing, the best way to access recordings of Fred McFalls' banjo playing is to visit the State Historical Society of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri, which houses the Phil and Vivian Williams Collection. Several reel-to-reel tapes feature Fred in a variety of settings, from home recordings and jam sessions, to live concerts in Seattle and elsewhere in western Washington.[222] Additionally, he is featured on several tracks on Voyager Recordings and Publications CD 302, Comin' Round the Mountain, an expanded reissue of the original Voyager LP.[223] Finally, the previously mentioned video footage of Fred playing guitar, banjo, and singing with old friend Ben Bryson can be seen on YouTube under the titles "Fred McFalls pt 1" and "Fred McFalls pt 2."[224]

[222] "Preliminary Inventory, Accession CA6217: Phil and Vivian Williams Collection," State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia.
[223] "CD 302: Comin' Round the Mountain," Voyager Recordings & Publications, accessed March 17, 2021, https://www.voyagerrecords.com/LN302.htm.
[224] Blues&Folk 1960's, "Fred McFalls pt 1," April 8, 2011, video, 12:59, https://youtu.be/kcAKze6tK_k; Blues&Folk 1960's, "Fred McFalls pt 2," April 8, 2011, video, 12:02, https://youtu.be/g8k-4fWHarU.

CHAPTER 5. EARLY COUNTRY MUSIC IN WASHINGTON

In the early phases of this project, it was convenient to view Fred McFalls as the chief architect of bluegrass in the Northwest, a sort of "father" of Washington bluegrass, in the spirit of Bill Monroe. While Fred's legacy and influence on the development of bluegrass in the region are without question, further research revealed a musical foundation that was already in place upon Fred's arrival. Prior to the Carolina Mountain Boys, various early forms of country music were well-represented across the state of Washington, beginning with a rich tradition of fiddle music, and continuing through the commercial string band era of the 1920s and 1930s, into the contemporary sounds of the 1940s and 1950s, which included elements of Western swing, honky-tonk, and bluegrass. A brief survey of these early country strains will help to contextualize Fred McFalls and the Carolina Mountain Boys within the musical landscape of western Washington.

Old-Time Fiddling

The history of fiddle music in the Pacific Northwest can be traced back to the first documented fiddle players in the area, George Gibson and Pierre Cruzatte, who were both members of the Corps of Discovery that arrived in 1805, led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Providing entertainment during the Corps' downtime, the fiddlers and accompanying dancers were also popular with many of the Native Americans they interacted with along the route, which may have been integral to the success of the expedition.[225] As European-American

[225] Phil Williams and Vivian Williams, "Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery Quotes About Fiddling and Dancing," Voyager Recordings & Publications, accessed March 3, 2020, https://www.voyagerrecords.com/arlc.htm.

settlers began moving west en masse, following the trail blazed by Lewis and Clark, fiddling and social dance became commonplace in the Northwest, just as it had been in other parts of the country for generations. Arriving from different parts of the United States and Canada, and tracing their roots to various countries in Europe, the region was a musical melting pot, with Canadian, Ozark, and Scandinavian fiddling traditions especially well-represented.[226]

One fiddler from this era, Arthur D. Streeter (1860-1942), was interviewed in 1938 as part of the Federal Writers' Project, having moved with his family from Michigan to Washington Territory in the early 1870s. Eventually settling in the community of Orchards, just east of Vancouver, Washington, Streeter organized a neighborhood orchestra in 1912, which included two fiddles, a cello, cornet, clarinet, flute, and flageolet. They became a popular draw at community dances throughout the area, providing both music and calling, with a repertoire that included well-known tunes like "Devil's Dream," "The Girl I Left Behind Me," and "Money Musk."[227] The community barn dances and informal musical gatherings that Streeter and other Northwest fiddlers participated in became an integral part of the social fabric as the region continued to evolve and expand further into the 20th century.

By the early 1900s, a network of grange halls was established to serve the needs of farming communities in Washington State. These rural outposts served many purposes, but as venues for music and dance, they comprised an informal circuit for working musicians to stitch together a living. Given the disparate cultural and geographical backgrounds represented in these communities, fiddlers were incentivized to gain fluency in a broad range of styles, accompanying various traditional dances, as well as contemporary trends, like the Charleston and foxtrot.

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[226] "Washington Fiddlers Project Panel Discussion," Voyager Recordings & Publications, accessed March 3, 2020, https://www.voyagerrecords.com/arpanel.htm.
[227] Vivian Williams, "Northwest Pioneer Fiddlers," Voyager Recordings & Publications, accessed March 3, 2020, https://www.voyagerrecords.com/arNWFiddlers.htm.

Joe Pancerzewski, who grew up in western North Dakota, and learned much of his old-time fiddling in neighboring Canada, followed his family to Bellingham, Washington in 1924. By this point, old-time fiddling had lost favor with mainstream audiences, giving way to the Jazz Age of the 1920s. In stark contrast to the rural grange dances he played upon his arrival in Washington, Pancerzewski was soon able to hire on with a twenty-piece big band, playing some of the finest ballrooms in the region, and demonstrating a great deal of skill and versatility in the process.[228] Shortly before he embarked on a forty-three-year career with the Great Northern Railway in 1927, Pancerzewski played Seattle's new Trianon Ballroom, the "nerve center of Seattle's swing era," which accommodated up to 5,000 dancers, and was the largest venue of its kind in the Northwest.[229]

Another fiddler of note, Chuck Griffin, grew up with the Ozark-style fiddling of his father, and began playing with a ten-piece Western swing band as a teenager in Arizona. In the early years of World War II, he moved with his family to the Northwest, where he initially played with dance bands in eastern Oregon, home to a significant population of Scottish-Americans and their traditional fiddle and dance styles. Upon entering the service, he lived at Fort Lewis, near Tacoma, and began playing at the Tropics Ballroom (Shelton), as well as Parker's Ballroom (Seattle), before going to Korea in 1951. At this time, he was playing a lot of Western swing material in a ten- to fifteen-piece band, but with the advent of bowling alleys and televisions, Griffin stated, "The dance business fell flat overnight," in the late 1940s and early 1950s.[230]

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[228] "Washington Fiddlers Project Panel Discussion."
[229] "Washington Fiddlers Project Panel Discussion;" "Seattle Historical Sites," Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, accessed March 3, 2020, https://web6.seattle.gov/DPD/HistoricalSite/QueryResult.aspx?ID=1173268072.
[230] "Washington Fiddlers Project Panel Discussion."

Aside from the dance circuit, fiddle contests provided another outlet for Northwest fiddlers to demonstrate their skill in the early 1900s, with newspaper records documenting contests in several localities throughout western Washington. One such article from 1925 announces an upcoming contest at the annual state fair in Puyallup. Placing a strong emphasis on old-time fiddling, no contestants were to be admitted under the age of fifty, with penalties for tunes considered to be more modern than the likes of "The Irish Washerwoman," "Old Black Joe," or "The Arkansaw [sic] Traveler." Competing fiddlers were invited to attend the fair at no cost from all over western Washington, with several participants expected from the Washington Soldiers Homes at Orting and Port Orchard—likely including veterans of the Civil War.[231] By the late 1940s, fiddle contests appeared to be on the decline, subject to the same fate as the region's dance circuit. In October 1948, a contest was scheduled to take place at Everett's Normanna Hall, with one category designated for traditional Norwegian dance tunes, including hallings and springdans, and another category for old-time hornpipes and reels. However, a subsequent article casts doubt on the event, suggesting the contest may have to be cancelled for lack of entries—a sign of diminishing interest in traditional fiddle playing among younger generations.[232]

The early history of fiddle music in Washington State reveals a common theme in the wide-ranging styles and cultural backgrounds displayed by Northwest fiddlers. The nature of fiddle music in the region would change considerably in the latter half of the twentieth century, especially given the influence of the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest in Weiser, Idaho, where

[231] "Old-Time Fiddlers At Puyallup Fair," *Arlington Times*, August 13, 1925, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of Stillaguamish Valley Pioneers.
[232] "'Fanitullen' — 'Devil's Dream' Fiddlers' Contest," *Arlington Times*, September 9, 1948, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of Stillaguamish Valley Pioneers; "Fiddlers Contest at Normanna," *Arlington Times*, September 16, 1948, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of Stillaguamish Valley Pioneers.

a highly polished brand of contest fiddling, sometimes referred to as "Texas Style," reigns supreme.

West Coast Hillbillies

Alongside traditional fiddle playing, commercial "hillbilly" music and related country subgenres quickly found an audience in the Pacific Northwest. As demonstrated by the research of music historian Peter Blecha, the region has been rife with country music activity since the earliest days of records and radio. From the 1920s, early country string bands played barn dances and grange halls throughout the Northwest, and along the West Coast. Laam's Happy Hayseeds, originally from John Day, Oregon, began performing in the 1920s,[233] and are noted for their early recordings of "Cottonwood Reel" and "Home Sweet Home," both recorded in March 1930, and released nationally by Victor Records.[234] Other bands of the day included the Dude Smith Family Band (Wenatchee), Ma Parker and her Western Swing Band (Centralia), "Oakie" Armstrong and his Chamberlain Carboys (Olympia), and Smokie Noland and the Cactus Cutups (Tacoma), among many others.[235]

Following World War II, as the eventual bluegrass community in Darrington began to take shape, the Pacific Northwest cemented its status as a major outpost for country music, part of a thriving West Coast circuit that reached all the way to Los Angeles. Prior to the war, country musicians made much of their living on the "kerosene circuit," an informal term for the network of highway roadhouses, grange halls, and rural schoolhouses that had yet to receive electricity,

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[233] Peter Blecha, "Country Music in the Pacific Northwest," HistoryLink.org, last modified August 18, 2005, https://www.historylink.org/File/7441.
[234] Tony Russell, *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921-1942* (New York: Oxford, 2008), 397.
[235] Blecha, "Country Music in the Pacific Northwest."

and were often illuminated, quite literally, by kerosene lanterns.[236] Eventually, a rich network of dance halls and ballrooms expanded across the region, providing employment opportunities for local musicians and national stars alike. Among these venues were Yakima's Stockman's Club, Snohomish's Kinney's Barn, Tacoma's Midland Hall, several rooms in Seattle, and the Evergreen Ballroom, just outside of Olympia.[237] The Evergreen, located along Highway 99 in Lacey, Washington, was among the most noteworthy dancehalls in the state, hosting a variety of national stars. On May 4, 1950, Roy Acuff and a Grand Ol' Opry package tour performed at the Evergreen Ballroom, featuring Hank Williams in the prime of his career[238]—who several years earlier had sampled area honky-tonks while training as a welder at the Kaiser Shipyard in Vancouver, Washington.[239]

Country music also found a home on Northwest radio and television at this time. In the mid-1940s, Seattle's KVI radio was the city's predominant source of country music on the airwaves, employing celebrity deejay Buck Ritchey, along with a house band, the K-VI ("K-six") Wranglers, which featured the talented husband-wife duo, Paul and Bonnie Tutmarc, and a brief stint with Jack Guthrie, before he signed with Capitol Records. Further south, "Cherokee Jack" Henley and his Rhythm Ridin' Wranglers could be heard regularly on Tacoma's KMO radio. Henley's "Don't Just Stand There," among the first country records released by a Northwest label (Evergreen Records), eventually caught the ear of Ernest Tubb while he was performing in the area, and later became a national hit for Carl Smith.[240] Across Puget Sound, in Bremerton, home to a major naval base, Arkie Shibley hosted a hillbilly music program on KBRO,

[236] Peter Blecha, "Evergreen Ballroom: Olympia's Lost Landmark (1931-2000)," HistoryLink.org, last modified March 14, 2011, https://www.historylink.org/File/9557.
[237] Blecha, "Country Music in the Pacific Northwest."
[238] Blecha, "Evergreen Ballroom."
[239] Blecha, "Country Music in the Pacific Northwest."
[240] Blecha, "Country Music in the Pacific Northwest."

assembling a band, the Mountain Dew Boys, which featured both steel guitar and five-string banjo. Popular on the radio and dancehall circuit, Shibley is best known for his hit record "Hot Rod Race," which peaked at number five on the Billboard Country Music chart in February 1951 and was a precursor to the popular auto racing-themed songs of early rock'n'roll and rockabilly, including the later spinoff hit, "Hot Rod Lincoln."[241]

"Texas" Jim Lewis, a Hollywood western film star, and prolific early country artist on radio and record, dating to the 1920s, settled in Seattle in 1950. He had been offered a Rainier Brewing Company-sponsored program, *Rainier Ranch*, which initially aired on KIRO radio, but quickly moved to a televised program under the same name at KING-TV. Realizing Lewis' talent as a multifaceted television entertainer, KING transitioned the program into a children's-oriented show, *Sheriff Tex's Safety Junction*, by the end of 1951. At its peak in the early fifties, the program was broadcast daily, but was retired in 1957, after which Lewis began hosting the *Sheriff Tex Show* on Tacoma's KTVW, before relocating it Vancouver, British Columbia in 1958. Lewis, along with half-brother Jack Rivers, continued performing the regional nightclub circuit with their Western swing band into the 1970s.[242]

Two of country music's biggest stars also had significant stopovers in Washington's 1950s music scene, before finding fame on a global scale. In 1958, Buck Owens was still trying to get his career off the ground in Bakersfield when Dusty Rhodes, who had helped him get started, suggested Buck join him in Washington. Buck quickly purchased an ownership interest in a small Tacoma radio station, KAYE, and began performing locally.[243] While still recording

[241] Peter Blecha, "Hot-Rod Songs of the Northwest," HistoryLink.org, last modified April 28, 2016, https://www.historylink.org/File/11222.

[242] Peter Blecha, "Lewis, 'Texas' Jim (1909-1990): Seattle's pioneering 1950s kiddie-TV show host," HistoryLink.org, last modified July 24, 2008, https://www.historylink.org/File/8657.

[243] Sisk, *Buck Owens: The Biography*, 32.

for Capitol Records in California, Buck continued to expand his reach in the Northwest, landing a gig as host of *The Bar-K Jamboree,* a weekly television program on Tacoma's KTNT.[244] His greatest windfall came when Dusty Rhodes introduced him to seventeen-year-old Donald Eugene Ulrich, a native of Tumwater, just outside the state capitol of Olympia.[245] The young guitar and fiddle player, known professionally as Don Rich, became Owens' musical right hand, giving him the spark he needed to eventually return to Bakersfield and dominate the Country charts throughout the 1960s.

While Buck Owens worked his regular gig at Tacoma's Britannia Tavern, he was enlisted to host a couple of talent shows. Each time, the winner was a young singer named Loretta Lynn.[246] In 1951, she joined her husband, Oliver "Doolittle" Lynn, near Custer, Washington, where he had found work as a farmhand—a favorable alternative to underground coal mining in Kentucky. After buying her a guitar, "Doo" encouraged Loretta to begin performing, eventually securing her a regular job at a Blaine, Washington tavern, along the Canadian border. Initially singing the Westerners, a local band, Loretta ended up forming Loretta's Trail Blazers with her brother Jay Lee Webb playing lead guitar. It was around this time she crossed paths with Buck Owens, setting off a chain of events that resulted in her debut single, "I'm a Honky Tonk Girl," recorded in 1960, and ultimately her debut on the Grand Ole Opry later that year. Capitalizing on her remarkable success, Lynn officially moved to Nashville in 1961.[247]

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[244] Ibid. 33-35.
[245] Ibid. 36.
[246] Ibid. 33.
[247] "Loretta Lynn: How the Country Superstar Got Her Start in Washington State," Northwest Prime Time, last modified August 29, 2015, http://northwestprimetime.com/news/2015/aug/29/loretta-lynn-how-country-superstar-got-her-start-w/?page=1.

The Sauk River Ramblers

Organized sometime after Fred McFalls' arrival in Darrington in the early 1950s, his band, the Carolina Mountain Boys, is widely considered to be the first professional bluegrass band in western Washington. However, a survey of area newspapers from the same period unearthed another group that may provide a critical link between the Carolina Mountain Boys and the already-established country music landscape in the region.

Dubbed "Darrington's famous hillbilly band,"[248] the Sauk River Ramblers were active in western Washington during the early 1950s. A semi-professional outfit, the Ramblers often provided music for local dances on the weekends, performing regularly for a time at Darrington's City Hall, as well as Camano Island's Camp Pleasant dance hall.[249] On June 3, 1951, they were enlisted to help promote Darrington's annual Timber Bowl, performing at the opening of a new shopping center in Everett, followed by a visit to Everett's KRKO studio, where they recorded a fifteen-minute transcription—described as a "hillbilly show"—which would be broadcast later that month. Darrington's George Bowman, Sr., fiddle, and Ray Riddle, guitar, also appeared on the program, performing a variety of fiddle tunes, including "Sally Goodin" and "Arkansas Traveler." A summary of the day's events sheds light on some of the Ramblers' repertoire, which included two country ballads, "I Overlooked an Orchid" and "Tomorrow's Just Another Day to Cry," the fiddle tune "Cripple Creek," and a five-string banjo

[248] Mrs. Horace Enyeart, "Darrington: Sixth Timber Bowl Staged At Darrington—Large Crowd," *Arlington Times*, July 5, 1951, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[249] Mrs. Horace Enyeart, "Darrington," *Arlington Times*, November 8, 1951, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.

performance of "Foggy Mountain Breakdown," which had only been released a year earlier by bluegrass pioneers, Flatt and Scruggs.[250]

Lead singer and guitarist, Wesley "Curt" Furr was originally from Concord, North Carolina, and moved to Darrington after graduating from North Carolina State College's School of Forestry in 1950.[251] Initially employed by the Forest Service upon arrival in Darrington,[252] Furr had been musically active during his time in college, regularly providing music for square dances with his band, the Lumberjacks.[253] Bruce "Klondike" Smith, banjo player for the Sauk River Ramblers, had also been a member of the Lumberjacks at North Carolina State, and played throughout western North Carolina for five years prior to his arrival in Darrington.[254] Bill O'Connor, considered "Darrington's best fiddler" at the time, was an old friend of Fred McFalls' from his North Carolina days. He had performed actively in Jackson and Haywood counties, and "hadn't heard anything but bluegrass," before moving to Darrington in 1948.[255] The only regular member without Tar Heel roots was guitar and steel player, Val Crawford, who grew up in Lyman, Washington, and was employed as an independent log truck driver in Darrington.[256] Crawford played with many area musicians, and had performed all along the West Coast, as far away as Phoenix, Arizona.[257]

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[250] "Sauk River Ramblers Dispense Entertaining Music," *Arlington Times*, June 7, 1951, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[251] North Carolina State College School of Forestry, *The Pinetum* (Raleigh, North Carolina: 1950), NCSU Libraries' Rare & Unique Digital Collections, https://ocr.lib.ncsu.edu/ocr/pi/pinetum1950/pinetum1950.pdf. 28.
[252] Mrs. Horace Enyeart, "Darrington," *Arlington Times*, November 1, 1951, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[253] North Carolina State College School of Forestry, *The Pinetum*, 69.
[254] "Sauk River Ramblers Dispense Entertaining Music," *Arlington Times*.
[255] Beryl Shawley, "Western Swing Music Society of Seattle: 15th Annual Pioneers of Western Swing Festival, 2005 Inductees," Northwest Western Swing Music Society, accessed December 12, 2019, https://www.nwwsms.com/index_htm_files/2005%20HOF.pdf.
[256] "Obituaries & Births: Laval Vivian (McDougle) Crawford," *Arlington Times*, November 22, 2000, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[257] "Sauk River Ramblers Dispense Entertaining Music," *Arlington Times*.

At the end of 1951, the Sauk River Ramblers combined forces with another area band, the Highland Trio, reorganizing themselves as the Cascade Hillbillies.[258] By early 1952, they held a half-hour timeslot on KRKO each Wednesday night, from 10:30 to 11:00, and were scheduling shows and dances across the region. A promotional photograph in the Arlington Times shows the current incarnation of the band, with Curt Furr standing behind the microphone, holding his Gibson J-50 guitar, accompanied by Val Crawford, on electric archtop guitar, and Bill O'Connor with his fiddle. Additional members, Betty Lou Steele and "Uncle" Pete Morris, appear with an accordion and upright bass, respectively.[259] Though a five-string banjo sits on a stand nearby, the presence of an electric archtop guitar and accordion strongly suggests they were not a straight-ahead bluegrass band at this time, and likely never were. Like Arkie Shibley's Mountain Dew Boys in Bremerton, which simultaneously featured a steel guitar and five-string banjo, the Sauk River Ramblers and Cascade Hillbillies probably reflected the broader trends of "hillbilly" country music at the time, incorporating elements of bluegrass and old-time, alongside honkytonk and Western swing.

While the reasons and exact timeline of the Cascade Hillbillies' demise are unknown, it is clear from newspaper records that, like many semi-professional groups of the time, they were subject to the responsibilities of work, family, and military service. By May 1952, with the United States involved in the Korean War, Curt Furr was on his way to Oakland, California, preparing to be sent overseas with the Navy. Concurrently, Val Crawford and his family were moving to Bremerton, where he began work in the Naval shipyards.[260] Both would return to the

[258] Mrs. Horace Enyeart, "Darrington," *Arlington Times*, December 6, 1951, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[259] Mrs. Horace Enyeart, "Darrington," *Arlington Times*, February 7, 1952, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of Stillaguamish Valley Pioneers.
[260] Mrs. Horace Enyeart, "Darrington," *Arlington Times*, May 8, 1952, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of Stillaguamish Valley Pioneers.

area and perform sporadically with the band over the next two years.[261] Bruce Smith, former Sauk River Ramblers banjo player, had also been involved in the war effort during this time, sailing to Japan and Korea with the Merchant Marine.[262] Meanwhile, fiddler Bill O'Connor continued playing locally, appearing at Kinney's Barn in Snohomish with a revamped Cascade Hillbillies lineup that retained Betty Lou Steele, as well as rising Northwest fiddler, Marty Dahlgren. During this same period, he would also become a member of Fred McFalls' Carolina Mountain Boys.[263]

The Sauk River Ramblers and Cascade Hillbillies were relatively short-lived, and not well-documented in the history of Northwest music, but represent an important bridge from the dance-driven, postwar country scene of western Washington, to the Tar Heel bluegrass community taking shape in Darrington in the 1950s. Founded by three North Carolinians, each with ties to the bluegrass and old-time music of their home state, it's reasonable to suggest the Ramblers, and later Hillbillies, helped pave the way for the Carolina Mountain Boys as pioneers in the burgeoning Tar Heel bluegrass community in Washington State.

[261] Mrs. Horace Enyeart, "Darrington," *Arlington Times*, January 29, 1953, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of Stillaguamish Valley Pioneers; Mrs. Horace Enyeart, "Darrington," *Arlington Times*, March 25, 1954, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[262] Mrs. Horace Enyeart, "Darrington," *Arlington Times*, August 14, 1952, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of Stillaguamish Valley Pioneers.
[263] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.

CHAPTER 6. TAR HEEL BLUEGRASS

Fred McFalls was by no means the only musician contributing to the Tar Heel bluegrass community during its heyday in Darrington. The following section will introduce Sam and Bertha Nations, along with Earl Jones, who were among the other bluegrass musicians settling in Darrington during the 1940s and 1950s. Certainly, many others deserve credit for the music community that was established over time, some of whom will be mentioned in passing. While this project will hopefully provide greater insight into the early years of Darrington's bluegrass community, further research is needed to provide a more complete history of the many important contributors and the long-running festival they helped initiate.

The Nations Family

Born in 1929, Bertha (Nations) Whiteside grew up in Hardins, North Carolina, a small unincorporated community less than ten miles north of Gastonia in North Carolina's piedmont. In a region known for textile production, Bertha's mother was one of many who found work in the local cotton mill, working there until she was seventy-eight years old. With resources spread thin and both parents working hard to support the family, some children were allowed to go to school, while others had to stay home to take care of their younger siblings. Bertha stayed in school until she graduated from the eighth grade, at which point her mother gave her the option of continuing school or staying home to help around the house.[264]

[264] Bertha (Nations) Whiteside and Brenda Fecht, interview by author, Darrington, January 12, 2018.

"Well, I had to quit school—I quit school when I graduated from the eighth grade. My mother told me she'd pay me three dollars a week, because I hadn't had very many bought clothes—we were poor. And we didn't have a rug on the floor. And so, I thought it sounded pretty good, and I told mom, and she said, 'Well, you can finish school if you want to.' But I said, 'Mom, I think I'm gonna quit school and help you and Dad. I'll stay home and keep Peggy.' That's my little sister. So, I stayed home and babysat, and she paid me three dollars a week. She bought us a rug for the floor. I'll never forget how good that felt—[over] that linoleum, with those cracks. But anyway, I felt like I was doing them a good deed, because we never had nothing much."[265]

At one point, Bertha went to work at the cotton mill with her mother, but that didn't last long: "I went to work a few days and I mashed my finger. I picked rollers—stuck my finger in the roller, mashed it. I went home—they sent me home—I never did go back. [My mother] made sure I didn't have to go back, because I didn't know how to work in there." After that, Bertha stayed home, helping raise the kids, and spent more of her free time playing music.[266]

Early on, Bertha could be heard singing in church while growing up in North Carolina. "That's how I started out; I used to sing a lot in church. I had to borrow a guitar. They found out I could play one and sing, and they'd asked me, and then I'd have to say, 'Well, if I can borrow a guitar, I'll be there.'" At home, they might listen to J.E. Mainer's Mountaineers on the radio, a North Carolina-based group, or sometimes the Grand Ole Opry.[267]

Bertha began playing guitar around the age of thirteen, learning out of a book that showed some of the basic chords. It didn't take her long to put it all together, and by fourteen,

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[265] Ibid.
[266] Ibid.
[267] Ibid.

she took home first place honors and a three-dollar prize from a talent show in Gastonia. The famous Coon Creek Girls came in second place, which Bertha told me with a big smile on her face—"I was thrilled to death!" Soon after, she began performing on WGNC radio out of Gastonia, where Pappy Millsap hosted a live program on Saturday nights, featuring a variety of bands. Bertha was a solo act but would enlist other musicians in the studio to accompany her on air, making the trek down to Gastonia every Saturday night. Bertha's mother did not allow her to accept rides to or from Gastonia, so Bertha took the bus there and back. One time, the Lone Star Yodeler was there, and offered her a job playing music. "I went home, I was all excited. I was ready to go—I was just fourteen! And [my mother] said, 'Bertha, you cannot do that, you're only fourteen years old!' I said, 'Momma, I love music!' She would not let me go. So, I didn't go—then I got married at fifteen."[268]

Sam Nations was from Wilmot, North Carolina, a small community in the mountains of Jackson County, near Sylva. He had left home, finding work in the cotton mill near Hardins, when he met Bertha, but later moved back to take care of his father. Sam had been playing music longer than Bertha had and had a banjo when they first met. He showed her a few things on guitar, and they quickly began playing music together and jamming with others in North Carolina. When they decided to get married, it became quite an ordeal for fifteen-year-old Bertha.[269]

> When [Sam] asked me to marry him and I told him I would, and Mom let me go, she said, "Now, you've got to be married when you come back now." I said, "Well, I will Mom." But she wouldn't let me go to his house to stay the night before we were going to get married. She said, "He has to take you to his sister's." So, he did—when we got up to the mountains, he took me to his sister's. Well, his sister said, "Lord child, you can't get married, you're only fifteen!" And I said, "Well, Bonnie, Sam told me I could get married at any age! I can't go back home now—my mother and dad will kill me! I had a nice

[268] Ibid.
[269] Ibid.

> name where I was at!" I had a decent name, a real good name. She said, "Well, I'll go with you." We had asked her to go with us the next morning. He called a taxi the next morning, and he came by and picked me up. We got in the taxi, and we got over there, and all the way over there, she'd say, "Now, don't forget and tell them when you were born. Don't say 1929," she said, "You say 1924." I said, "Okay." So, I did, I told them, and I married under that—told them a lie.[270]

They travelled all the way to Clayton, Georgia to get married, and the first thing Bertha had to show her parents when she returned was a marriage certificate. After a short time in Panama City, Florida, where Sam found work in a shipyard during the latter stages of World War II, the young couple set their sights on western Washington. Sam had difficulty finding work back home in North Carolina and had siblings that moved out to Darrington in the early 1940s. His brother and sister in Darrington had written back home, telling of how much money they were making in the timber industry out west, and Sam was determined to follow their lead.[271]

In 1947, Bertha and Sam, along with their first son, Darrell, boarded a train bound for the Pacific Northwest. They had bought a used trunk to ship their belongings, but money being scarce, Bertha was forced to sell her guitar, and Sam his banjo, to afford the cross-country fare. Following the path forged by Sam's siblings, the Nations' decision to move west for greater economic opportunity was typical of Appalachian migration in the twentieth century.[272]

Upon their arrival in Darrington, Sam looked around and asked, "Well, where's it at?" All they saw were a few houses. Sam's sister Carrie took them in until they could find a place to live. The towering peaks of the North Cascades were an imposing sight for Bertha, who describes her home in the North Carolina piedmont as "flatland." She did not like the mountains until she got used to them. Furthermore, having never been far from family, Bertha got

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[270] Ibid.
[271] Ibid.
[272] Ibid.

homesick. They did not initially have a phone, so letters were her only means of communicating with her family back in North Carolina. Sam and Bertha's daughter Brenda spoke to the difficulty of being separated from family, saying, "I used to beg her when I was in high school: 'Call Grandma, call Grandma!' But back then that was a long-distance phone call. Finally, she told me—I said, 'Mom, why don't you want to call Grandma?' And she said, 'Because when I call her, I just miss her more.'"[273]

"We went back [to North Carolina] every chance we could get," Bertha says. It took time to save money for the trip, on top of all the costs associated with raising a family. By the early 1960s, their desire to go home to North Carolina was strong enough that they finally decided to move. As with the chain migration patterns that saw family members following each other out of Appalachia, it was just as common for the draw of family and familiarity to eventually bring Appalachian migrants back home. Sam wanted to move back and be a farmer, so they tried it for two years, living without modern amenities like indoor plumbing. Stories from that time are still told in the family, such as the novelty of visiting Sam's aunt and uncle, who had their outhouse over a creek. Deciding again that they could not make a living in North Carolina, the Nations family set off for Darrington once and for all, knowing Sam could reliably find work in the timber industry there. After school let out in the summer of 1963, Sam, Bertha, and all four kids loaded into a Chevrolet car with room for clothes, a few toys, and not much else. Brenda remembers crying when they left; the trip to Washington took about six days.[274]

They eventually came to live in an area called Pumpkin Town, just outside the main part of Darrington. The house where Bertha and I spoke used to be Sam's sister's place, and at one time, three of his brothers, plus his sister, all lived on the same road leading up to the end of the

[273] Ibid.
[274] Ibid.

hollow. For the children, this meant growing up with their cousins right next door. Brenda describes a family closeness, of which music was a big part, as it was their primary form of entertainment.[275]

Many traditions from North Carolina carried over to Washington, including community corn shuckings, along with gardening and traditional food preservation techniques like canning. Tar Heel beans, otherwise known as leather britches, along with the requisite biscuits continued to be a staple menu item, as did pinto beans and cornbread. Even hog killings, which used to be major community events, persist to this day—Bertha participated in a hog killing as recently as 2017. Traditional dance, including the occasional square dance, was another call back to North Carolina. When Brenda was young, her sister taught her the "Tar Heel Stomp," more commonly referred to in the South as flatfooting or clogging. Brenda took her newfound skill to a grade school talent show, where she won first place, impressing a Pacific Northwest audience largely unfamiliar with this form of dance.[276]

Music was, of course, the primary carryover from North Carolina, and arguably the most effective means of building community amongst fellow North Carolinians living in Washington State. During their early years in Darrington, Bertha and Sam discovered a music scene that primarily consisted of church music and jam sessions at peoples' homes, including that of Fred and Alice McFalls. Bertha doesn't remember hearing about bluegrass bands playing in area bars but suggests that some may have played in the local Eagles club. There are rumors of the Stanley Brothers performing in Darrington in the 1950s, years before national bluegrass acts began to

[275] Ibid.
[276] Ibid.

appear at the high school auditorium or Darrington Bluegrass Festival. Brenda recalls Sam mentioning something about this but was not able to provide specific details.[277]

Bertha and Sam quickly found out about the Tar Heel picnics, held annually in Everett's Forest Park, which provided an opportunity for local musicians to get together. Up in Darrington, the frequent jam sessions held in each other's homes were the primary gathering point for Tar Heel musicians. In addition to Fred and Alice McFalls, other hosts and participants included local fiddler Robert Cope, Earl Jones, Roy Morgan, Louis Asch, and O.C. Helton. These gatherings weren't all music, however; sharing food was just as important, and as Bertha told me, they always had a meal. Eventually, these house jams grew into a monthly jam at the Community Center every second Sunday, with an afternoon full of music, followed by dinner.[278]

Grover and Ernestine Jones were also at the center of the local jamming community and had a spacious living room that could accommodate a large group of musicians. "We used to go to Grover and Ernestine's and stay 'til one or two o'clock in the morning, because Sam—Sam wasn't playing too good [in his later years], and he'd sneak around and he'd whisper to Grover—Grover would say to Sam, 'Now, you stay after everybody leaves. I want you to play with me.' And he'd stay and play with him, because everybody would be gone, you know. Yeah, he loved for us to do that—Sam thought a lot of Grover."[279]

Bertha and Sam played together for many years with their band, the Combinations. Drawing from the country music repertoire of the day, they covered a variety of material, including songs like "Little White Church on the Hill" and "Your Love Letters." Sam knew the so-called "killing songs," Bertha told me—murder ballads like "Poor Ellen Smith"—but she

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[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid.

didn't care for those, preferring the gospel and love songs. Bertha was singing country music on the radio during her early years in North Carolina, and as she and Sam started playing bluegrass together, she thought it was essentially the same; just faster, more upbeat. While Sam considered the music they played "old-time," the musicians around Darrington mostly referred to it as "bluegrass," according to Bertha. "Well, it's about all the same, except it's speeded up...they used to get some of them old songs and speed 'em up—[then] called it 'bluegrass.'" Gospel music was always a cornerstone of their repertoire, and a genre Bertha has performed a lot over the years. Sam always made sure to include at least one gospel song in every set, no matter where they were performing, with some of their favorite selections being "Life's Railway to Heaven" and "The Old Country Church."[280]

When I spoke with Bertha in early 2018, she was looking forward to opening the 42nd annual Darrington Bluegrass Festival with the Combinations later that summer, having played every year since the festival began in 1977. Bertha and Sam were among the group that initiated the festival as co-founders of the Darrington Bluegrass and Country Music Makers Association. Before Sam passed away in 2000, the Combinations were able to book time in a Marysville, Washington studio, where they produced a full-length album of bluegrass classics entitled *Mountain Laurel*. "That morning, when we was going to go down to have that made, that cassette, [Sam] said, 'Bertha, I don't hardly feel like going,' and I said, 'Sam, we've already got an appointment with them recorders,' I said. 'We have to go.' So he went, but that's right before he passed away." They were able to record the whole album in two takes, a remarkable feat under any circumstances, and the result is a fitting testimony to the music Sam and Bertha made

[280] Ibid.

together over half a century.[281] Since then, the Combinations have recorded two more albums, both featuring Bertha's daughter, Brenda, singing alongside her mother.[282]

Bertha (Nations) Whiteside, along with Ernestine Jones, Alice McFalls, and many others, stands as a testament to the critical roles women have performed in establishing Darrington's bluegrass community. From her work as a musician and festival organizer, to her work at home—raising children, maintaining family ties, and passing along traditions, including music—Bertha exemplifies what Laney describes as the "symbiotic relationship between female labor and bluegrass,"[283] extending far beyond the stage.

The Jones Family

Rich Jones carries on the musical legacy of Washington's Tar Heel bluegrass community, the son of Jackson County-native Earl Jones. Speaking with him in his Mt. Vernon, Washington home, I learned about not only his father's legacy as a first-generation migrant, but Rich's own involvement in the Washington bluegrass scene, for which he is highly regarded as a banjo player, vocalist, and guitarist. Rich was born in Darrington and is connected to many of the notable Tar Heels who helped establish bluegrass music in the area. His grandmother was a Nations, sister to Sam Nations, while Grover Jones was a first cousin to Rich's father. Just as important, Rich grew up next door to the McFalls household in Darrington and stayed close after both families moved to Marysville in the mid-1960s. The McFalls daughters often babysat Rich when he was young.[284]

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[281] Whiteside and Fecht, interview; The Combinations, "Mountain Laurel," 1999, cassette tape.
[282] The Combinations, "Blue for You," 2003, compact disc; The Combinations, "Traveling the Highway Home," [no release date], compact disc.
[283] Laney, "Recreating and Deconstructing the Shifting Politics of (Bluegrass) Festivals," Abstract.
[284] Jones, interview.

As a child, the first bluegrass music Rich heard came from these sources; his father, Earl, Fred McFalls, and Sam and Bertha Nations. He specifically credits the Nations family for much of his interest in music, saying, "The Nations side, they were all real fun-loving and happy-go-lucky, all full of music, and ready to have a jam and party with you." Ben Bryson and Roy Morgan were among the other Tar Heel musicians that surrounded Rich during his early years, a part of the informal network of jam sessions taking place in Darrington homes. Earl would often take Rich over to the McFalls household, where Alice, a model of Southern hospitality, would prepare food, while Fred and Earl played music. The Jones family maintained a close relationship with the McFalls, and Rich became good friends with the McFalls boys—Roger, Jimmy, and Martin—playing music with them, and later joining the McFalls' family band, Fred's Home Grown. After the McFalls children had all moved out, and Earl took a mill job in Aberdeen, Washington, Rich continued to visit with Fred and Alice, with Fred sometimes backing him up on guitar, while Rich honed his chops on the banjo.[285]

At twelve years old, not long after his parents' divorce, Rich went to North Carolina to spend the summer with his grandparents, but ended up staying until he was seventeen, attending Sylva-Webster High School. Rich's grandfather, who played a two-finger banjo style, would take him to bluegrass shows in nearby Maggie Valley, where Rich met western North Carolina music legends Raymond Fairchild and Rufus Sutton. During this period, Rich decided to pour his energy into playing the banjo and began practicing on his grandpa's banjo in the back room. "I asked my dad—he lived here in Washington, and I was in North Carolina—and I said, 'Dad, I really want to get serious and play the banjo.' And he said, 'Okay, I'm gonna send you a banjo.'" Earl's cousin, Grover Jones, and his wife Ernestine were planning to drive to North Carolina that

[285] Ibid.

summer to visit family, so they brought Rich a Gibson RB-250 that Earl had laying around. "I think we went to Waynesville, and I bought an Earl Scruggs record and the [*Earl Scruggs and the 5-String Banjo*] book...I'd go into the bedroom and I'd practice that over and over and over, and I just got better and better and better."[286]

Rich appreciates the years he spent living with his grandparents in North Carolina, an experience his younger sisters never had. "It was like going back in time when I lived with [my grandpa], you know. He plowed...with a mule or a steer, raised a huge garden, little bit of tobacco—he'd dry it out there, and he'd chew that tobacco and farm...there was a lot of history there." Returning home from Germany in 1983, having served two years in the Army, Rich immediately made plans to visit his grandparents in North Carolina. He went to Henken Chevrolet in Arlington (Washington), bought a car, and began driving east the very next morning, speaking to the connections between family and place that can span an entire country.[287]

When Rich first moved back to Washington in 1978, he started a band with Earl under the banner Earl Jones Pickers. Earl had played the inaugural Darrington Bluegrass Festival the year before, and Rich joined him on banjo for the festival's second year. Other members of the band included Grover Jones, Kevin Bennett, and his mother, Sharon Bennett, longtime organizer and emcee of the Darrington Bluegrass Festival, and co-founder of the Washington Bluegrass Association.[288] Rich would also attend the monthly jam sessions at the Darrington Community Center during this time. He initially played with Earl, but eventually started getting invited to play with others as he got better. "That was my whole thing—I couldn't wait...to go to [the jam

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[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid.
[288] John Lawless, "Sharon Bennett passes," Bluegrass Today, last modified September 17, 2015, https://bluegrasstoday.com/sharon-bennett-passes/.

sessions] and play up there." Several of Rich's aunts and uncles would come to see him perform. "We'd get up and play for twenty minutes, or a half hour...get up and be a little star, you know, playing for thirty people—a bunch of old codgers from Darrington. And you just thought it was like the best thing in the world."[289]

After Earl moved to Aberdeen in 1980, Rich continued to establish himself in the Northwest bluegrass community, playing with some of the region's top musicians and bands, including a brief period with John Reischmann and the Jaybirds, with whom he was the original guitar player. "I've just played with everybody here in the Northwest, really...there's only so many musicians." Noting the relative scarcity of serious bluegrass vocalists in the Northwest, Rich considers himself fortunate that he had to learn to sing if he was going to play with Earl. "He wanted me to sing—but he needed me to sing to play with him." Despite his standing as one of the top banjo players in the Northwest, Rich has been called upon most often for his singing and rhythm guitar playing in the various bands he's played with over the years.[290]

> *Earl Jones, originally of Jackson County in western North Carolina, has just hauled off and sung one, his nasal hardpan voice stripped of all flatland Yankee lisping, phrasing the lyrics to the resonances of Fred McFalls' five-string Gibson banjo, thrumming hard on his own scuffed and definitely not electrified guitar.*
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> *Earl and Fred are having a little get-together at the McFalls' home in Marysville, up by the Skagit Valley country of Washington State, and the windows are vibrating from the twanging and musicating, and the youngsters are tapping their feet and jigging. There is fun and love in that house, boy.*
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> *The neighbors of half a mile around can hear the good sounds, too, and some of them are switching off Beatles albums and even the Kountry Kayo radio station to listen.*[291]

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[289] Jones, interview.
[290] Ibid.
[291] Houston, "That Good Old Mountain Soul."

Originally from Wilmot, North Carolina, Earl Jones left for Darrington in 1955, twenty years old and seeking to earn a living in the woods. According to his son, Rich, "[My dad] got here [one] day, and the next day he was working...had to go to town and get a pair of cork boots and head up the hill." Like so many Tar Heels before him, Earl followed in the footsteps of family and friends who had already made the move, sending back word of plentiful jobs and higher wages. Sam Nations, Earl's uncle on his mother's side, was the first family member to head west, leaving for Darrington with his wife, Bertha, in 1947. While his father stayed in North Carolina, working many years for the Mead Corporation, which operated a large paper mill in Sylva, each of Earl's five uncles also made the trek to Washington. Having grown up farming and working various odd jobs, they were drawn west by the allure of the "Great Northwest" and its bountiful forests, which paid double or triple what you could earn back home. Rich helps set the scene, with four or five of Earl's uncles shoulder-to-shoulder in the car, driving across the country together: "They were all tall like me, you know—six-foot-something. I just picture them arriving in Darrington and getting out of the car—these tall, lanky boys getting out, you know—3000 miles from North Carolina. And most of them had never been 50 miles from their home until they came out here, so it must have been an experience."[292]

When he first moved to Darrington, Earl lived in a cabin on Clear Creek, just south of town, with fellow North Carolinian, Roy Morgan. "Roy could play banjo and play guitar, and so could my dad," Rich says, "And they'd trade back and forth. They'd play music and hang out, and then they'd work in the woods together." By 1964, then-married with a young family, Earl was driving log trucks, hauling loads down to the Weyerhaeuser lumber mill in Everett. One day, while preparing his trailer for the drive back to Darrington, he stopped by the main office and

[292] Jones, interview.

asked if they were hiring. The foreman looked at Earl and replied, "Yeah, can you start Monday?" Earl said, "Yes," and went on to work for Weyerhaeuser for forty-one years. Shortly thereafter, the Jones family bought a house in nearby Marysville, where Rich's mother still lives today. In 1980, after Weyerhaeuser closed their plant in Everett, Earl moved to Aberdeen, and continued working at the Weyerhaeuser pulp mill in Cosmopolis.[293]

Family was important to Earl, which is something he instilled in Rich from a young age. During the years Earl worked in woods, the logging companies in Darrington would shut down around Thanksgiving due to snow. For several years, he would load the family in the car and drive to his parents' farmhouse in North Carolina, where he delivered heating oil during the winter months, giving the kids an opportunity to spend time with their grandparents. "I have these great pictures of us at rest stops, and my mom's made a picnic, and us kids have all got a little sandwich [while] my dad is checking the oil on the car in the background." Later on, while he was living in North Carolina, Rich watched as his aunts and uncles made frequent trips across the country to visit family. "It was nothing for any of them to just hop in a car and go...if you wanted to see them, you had to get in the car and drive."[294]

After they moved to Marysville, Earl and Rich would often drive to Darrington to visit family. "He'd say, 'We're going to Darrington, you ready to go?' And I'd say, 'Yeah, Dad.' And we'd load in the car, me and him, and we'd drive to Darrington. And my dad would make the rounds, you know, and he'd see all of his aunts and uncles. And I'd get to see them. You know, I really appreciate that about my dad, that he did that, because I was so close to all of them. You had to go and see them, you know, because there was no other way. I mean, you could call them

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[293] Ibid.
[294] Ibid.

on the phone, but that was also a way for him to do something on a Sunday and get out of the house."[295]

While he made sure that Rich had strong relationships with his family on both sides of the country, Rich doesn't seem to think Earl or his uncles longed to move back home to North Carolina. "I don't think my dad really thought that living back there was that great. He couldn't wait to get out of there and move here. And I come along, and I lived with my grandparents, so I have this nostalgia for it, but I don't think my dad ever really did, you know. He did somewhat—his mom and dad were there, but after that...I don't think a lot of them longed for being back there again. They got out of there as fast as they could, they moved out here, they raised their families, they worked—and of course they brought a lot of their traditions and their things with them."[296]

Earl came from a musical family on both sides. In addition to Sam and Bertha Nations, on his mother's side of the family, Earl's father played banjo in a two-finger style. His brothers were also musical, as was his cousin, Grover Jones. For his part, Earl played guitar and banjo, but was probably best-known for his singing. "My dad, until the day he died, it sounded like he'd just got out of the car from North Carolina," recalls Rich. "He had a very thick southern accent, and when he sang, he sang like that...I think that's what really made him sound—he sounded good, but he sounded authentic, you know?" Earl's banjo playing would probably be classified as an old-time style, by contemporary standards. According to Rich, Earl was adept at the "frailing," or "clawhammer" style, and could use it to accompany his voice for traditional songs, similar to the way Ralph Stanley would play a song like "Little Birdie." "Him and Roy Morgan kind of played the same—they had this unusual style, you know, these [banjo] rolls—they were

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[295] Ibid.
[296] Ibid.

like me; they were young guys trying to figure it out. There wasn't anybody teaching anything. They listened to records, trying to figure out rolls and things like that...They never really played a true—like a Scruggs style, you know. It was a little bit different."[297]

Speaking to the music community he grew up with in Darrington, Rich says, "For a while, it was pretty much just right there, localized in Darrington. I remember there was Louie Ashe, Roy Morgan, Bob Cope, Grover Jones, O.C. Helton, and my dad. And Bertha. And they were jamming there at Grover's trailer park—Grover owned a trailer park in Darrington, him and Ernestine—and they would jam there."[298]

At one of the annual Tar Heel picnics, held in Everett's Forest Park, Earl met Tennessee-native Harley Worthington, who was there seeking out other pickers—"They really hit it off." Harley worked at Scott Paper, near the Weyerhaeuser plant where Earl worked in Everett, and started coming over to the Jones' house in Marysville to play music. Rich remembers Harley telling him about those days, saying something like, "I'd come over there to your dad and mom's house, and me and your dad would sit there in the living room, and we'd play until two in the morning, and we'd have to get up and go to work. And your mom would just keep bringing us something to eat, and she'd say, 'Now, Earl, you better go to bed, you've got to get up and go to work.'" And then they would usually play a couple more. Ultimately, in 1972, Harley and Earl cut a 45rpm record for Budro Records in nearby Edmonds. Released under the name Earl Jones and the Harley Worthington pickers, the recordings of "Little Cabin Home on the Hill" and "That Moon Won't Be Shining the Same" are a fitting testament to Earl's abilities as a singer,

[297] Ibid.
[298] Ibid.

and provide rare insight into the music being made in Washington's Tar Heel bluegrass community at the time.[299]

Looking back, Rich considers his dad one of the stronger Darrington-area musicians. "He was really different. And even to this day, I hear a lot of the old-timers talk about my dad and how good he was, you know, and he was. He was really good." Earl's move to Aberdeen in 1980 essentially marked "the end of his music"—he didn't play much after that, due in part to the lack of bluegrass musicians in that part of the state.[300]

Tar Heel Picnics

> *Memories of childhood associations will be revived when friends and acquaintances of by-gone days meet for the first time since leaving their native state. It is likely that every section of North Carolina will be represented from the Great Smoky and Blue Ridge Mountains on the west to the Cape Fear River and Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds on the east. From the valleys of the Tennessee, Tuckaseigee, French Broad, Catawba, Yadkin, Neuse, Roanoke, and Cape Fear, thousands of hardy pioneers have heard the call of the West and are now filling a place in the destiny of Washington.*[301]

Sam and Bertha Nations began attending the Tar Heel picnics soon after they moved to Darrington in 1947. "As soon as we found out where they were playing music, we wanted to go," Bertha told me.[302] Held annually at Everett's Forest Park, the Tar Heel picnics were among the most important gathering points for the Tar Heel bluegrass community in western Washington. While serving as a reunion for well-established North Carolinians in the region, the picnics also

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[299] Earl Jones and the Harley Worthington Pickers, "Little Cabin Home on the Hill," recorded 1972, on *Budro*, streaming audio, accessed April 10, 2019, https://youtu.be/yVxldh9371U; Earl Jones and the Harley Worthington Pickers, "That Moon Won't Be Shining the Same," recorded 1972, on *Budro*, streaming audio, accessed April 10, 2019, https://youtu.be/eDbU36xoA7c.
[300] Jones, interview.
[301] "Tarheels to Picnic at Woodland," *Arlington Times*, August 6, 1931, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of Stillaguamish Valley Pioneers.
[302] Whiteside and Fecht, interview.

served as a confluence for recent migrants seeking to connect, socially and musically, with their predecessors from a shared background.

A sampling of local newspapers from the 1930s through 1960s sheds light on the history of the Tar Heel picnics and organization behind them. Variously referred to as the "North Carolina Society"[303] or the "North Carolina 'Tar Heel' Association,"[304] the civic organization was comprised of expatriates from the Tar Heel State, with a board of officers elected annually at the picnic.[305] Over the years, committee members included such familiar names as Alice McFalls (secretary-treasurer), Larry Mull (executive secretary and entertainment chairman), and Grady Mills (president), who was featured with his family on Voyager Records' Comin' Round the Mountain LP.[306]

Formally known as the "North Carolina State Convention and Picnic," the Tar Heel picnics were typically held every first Sunday of August, beginning in 1920 at Seattle's Woodland Park.[307] The forested park on Seattle's north end remained the primary host venue into the 1940s, with other western Washington communities, including Monroe[308] and Arlington,[309] occasionally taking up the mantle. By the 1950s, the picnics moved to Forest Park in Everett, where they were well-attended for several years, before ultimately withering away in the 1980s. It was during these years at Forest Park that the pioneers of the Darrington bluegrass

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[303] "Heard About Town: North Carolina Picnic," *Arlington Times*, August 1, 1940, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of Stillaguamish Valley Pioneers.
[304] Hazel Holm, "Darrington: Tar Heel Picnic Sunday, Aug. 6," *Arlington Times*, July 13, 1961, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[305] "State Tar Heels to Picnic Aug. 6," *Arlington Times*, August 3, 1950, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of Stillaguamish Valley Pioneers.
[306] "CD 302: Comin' Round the Mountain," Voyager Recordings & Publications.
[307] "Tar Heel State Convention and Picnic Aug. 5," *Arlington Times*, July 5, 1962, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[308] "Darrington: Attend Tar Heel Picnic," *Arlington Times*, August 8, 1935, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of Stillaguamish Valley Pioneers.
[309] Mrs. Horace Enyeart, "Darrington: Darrington At Tar Heel Picnic," *Arlington Times*, August 9, 1951, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.

community gathered to share music and memories of home, and where they eventually forged bonds with a new generation of bluegrass enthusiasts from Seattle.

Throughout the years, the picnics featured a variety of organized activities and guest speakers, with shared music, food, and camaraderie always at the forefront. Members of the North Carolina Association, whose primary concern was putting on the annual event, would typically provide coffee, while guests were encouraged to bring a basket lunch. An Arlington Times news column announcing the 1931 gathering called upon "every person who hails from the Old North State...to round up the entire family for the event and to contribute a basket of southern style cooking for the spread that is to cover a table several hundred feet long."[310] While the picnic was advertised in local newspapers throughout western Washington, its reach extended much further—in 1961, the farthest-travelled attendee had covered 3,500 miles to attend. Aside from distance, honors were given to the oldest person in attendance, as well as the youngest mother.[311] In 1962, a Picnic Queen was crowned for the first time.[312]

Musical activities ranged from organized singing and dancing to informal jam sessions scattered throughout the park. A summary of the 1935 picnic reports on performances by a reformatory school band and a choir, which included members from local choirs in Lyman, Hamilton, and Darrington—all Tar Heel-rich communities.[313] In 1951, the Sauk River Ramblers gave a performance, while also accompanying Alice, Shirley, and Frances White (The White Trio), a group of young singers from Darrington.[314] Later years specifically highlighted bluegrass and country music, with a 1959 wrap-up in the Concrete Herald citing performances by several

[310] "Tarheels to Picnic at Woodland," *Arlington Times*.
[311] "Tar Heel State Convention and Picnic Aug. 5," *Arlington Times*.
[312] Hazel Holm, "Darrington: North Carolinians Prepare for Picnic," *Arlington Times*, March 29, 1962, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[313] "Darrington: Attend Tar Heel Picnic," *Arlington Times*.
[314] Mrs. Horace Enyeart, "Darrington: Darrington At Tar Heel Picnic," *Arlington Times*.

instrumentalists and singers, including Bill O'Connor of Sedro-Woolley on violin (fiddle), as well as Bill Davis and Fred McFalls of Darrington on guitar and banjo, respectively.[315]

Owing to their significance to the development of the Pacific Northwest bluegrass community, the Tar Heel picnics remained a central point of interest while conducting interviews for this project. Harley Worthington, who will be featured in greater detail in the following chapters, went to his first picnic in 1961, having recently moved to Washington from East Tennessee, after joining the Air Force. By chance, Harley met Roy Caudill, an older banjo player from North Carolina, while working at a construction site near Lynnwood. Roy invited Harley to the annual picnic in Everett, and like Sam and Bertha Nations, Harley was motivated by the opportunity to connect with local bluegrass musicians, thinking he had left the music behind when he moved west. It was there at his first picnic that he met his friend Earl Jones, as well as fellow Tennessee-native, Hank English, with whom he would later form The Tennesseans, an influential band in the burgeoning Northwest bluegrass community. Harley describes a scene with numerous jam sessions spread around, and a small stage featuring organized bands, Fred McFalls' group among them. Speaking to the reunion quality of the picnics, Harley told me Tar Heels would travel all the way from North Carolina to attend, confirming reports in some of the newspaper accounts.[316]

"We went every year," recalls Janie McFalls-Bertalan, whose mother, Alice McFalls, kept the coffee pots filled, and helped promote the event as secretary-treasurer of the North Carolina Society, once again illuminating the important roles women have played in the Tar Heel bluegrass community.[317] "It got really, really big...you wouldn't believe how many people would

[315] "Tarheel Picnic Best In A Number Of Years," *Concrete Herald*, August 6, 1959, Concrete Heritage Museum.
[316] Worthington, interview.
[317] "Tar Heel picnic set August 2nd," *Arlington Times*, July 23, 1970, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.

show up to this thing. All the way from Blaine, Bellingham, up in there, all the way down to Seattle. People coming from all over."[318] Janie remembers music being the main focus of the picnics, with a flatbed truck serving as a de facto stage, and people signing up to play different time slots, akin to an open mic. "It was a park, so us kids had swings and teeter-totters and merry-go-rounds, and stuff like that...And then the older people, of course, they had the music, and that was when you could bring beer and alcohol in, before they started clamping down on that because it got out of hand." Elzie Cox, former president of Washington's North Carolina Society, eventually persuaded Fred and Alice McFalls to take over the organization of the picnics, which they ran until 1971. Fellow Tar Heel musician Grady Mills picked up where they left off, but by then, the picnics were on the decline. As Janie told me, "People just didn't show up anymore, especially the pickers."[319]

During their peak in the 1960s, the annual Tar Heel picnics at Everett's Forest Park were critical to the formation of a lasting bluegrass community in western Washington. Further north, a similar event, aimed at former Missourians, was held in Lynden, WA, to much the same effect. Prior to the advent of bluegrass festivals in the Northwest, which did not begin until the 1970s, these functions provided a public venue for dispersed Southerners to rekindle the musical traditions they carried with them over the course of their westward migration.

Vivian Williams, whose many contributions to the Northwest bluegrass community will be explored in the ensuing pages, emphasized the importance of the Tar Heel picnics, and other social get-togethers, as gathering points for Southern musicians in western Washington, with plenty of overlap occurring from one to the next. "They had the Missouri picnic up by Lynden, and you know, the same people would show up, because there [were] some of the Missouri

[318] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.
[319] Ibid.

people up in that area [who] were also friends of all the old-time and bluegrass people around Darrington…[the picnics] were important get-together opportunities for these guys."[320]

As the gatherings were open to all comers, the Tar Heels were soon joined by a growing number of young musicians from Seattle, including Vivian and her husband, Phil, whose interest in the music superseded their geographical origins. Through this convergence of elder tradition-bearers and enthusiastic students of the music, a sustaining bluegrass community began to take form in the Pacific Northwest.

Timber Bowl

The Tar Heel picnics were not the only musical outlet for North Carolinians living in western Washington during the 1950s and 60s. Like many small mountain towns in the Pacific Northwest, whose identities and livelihoods were so closely tied to forestry, Darrington held a celebration each summer, commemorating the timber industry and its integral role in the local economy. From 1946 to 1967, the Timber Bowl was held annually in late June or early July.[321] Typical of many such civic events, it served as a community fundraiser, and featured a grand parade and assortment of activities, catering to people of all ages, while drawing visitors from far and wide. Though logging was its central theme, the rich musical heritage of the area's Tar Heel bluegrass community was on full display throughout the Timber Bowl's heyday in Darrington.

"That was a pretty big thing going on in Darrington at that time," says Bertha (Nations) Whiteside, whose kids always looked forward to the festivities. Along with their band, The Combinations, Bertha, and her husband Sam, would perform from the back of a truck, taking

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[320] Williams, interview.
[321] Poehlman, *Darrington: Mining Town/Timber Town*, 111-112.

part in the big Timber Bowl parade.[322] Preceded by a children's parade, the main procession would include marching bands, drill teams, floats from various local organizations, and loaded log trucks, along with other displays that illustrated the many aspects of the timber industry.[323] Prizes were given out in a variety of categories, including "Comedy," which was awarded to Fred Blanten in 1953 for a float that featured his hunting dogs with a live wildcat up a tree. Other activities involved exhibitions of tree topping and falling, and a number of industry-related contests, including the state championships in log bucking and trailer backing.[324]

Dances were another highlight of the Timber Bowl and provided opportunities for area musicians to showcase their talents in front of local and visiting crowds alike. Dubbed "Darrington's famous hillbilly band," the Sauk River Ramblers were included in the opening Friday evening ceremonies during the 1951 Timber Bowl, supplying music for a street dance that same night, with "square dancing, buck dancing, and some round dances" alluding to the community's Tar Heel pedigree.[325] Bertha emphasized the sometimes-rowdy nature of the Timber Bowl, particularly with the open consumption of alcohol. "Down here in the street—it was in the street, you know—I couldn't get over the way the women did. The women would drink just like the men! See, I wasn't used to being around alcohol; my family wasn't. Them women would get just as drunk as the men!"[326] Bertha had a good laugh describing the scene.

In 1962, Fred McFalls and Larry Mull, a musician and folklorist from western North Carolina, were among the organizers of a fiddler's convention at the Timber Bowl, shining a spotlight on Darrington's unique music community at the town's largest annual gathering.

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[322] Whiteside and Fecht, interview.
[323] "Darrington Timber Bowl Attracts Large Crowd," *Arlington Times*, July 2, 1953, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[324] Ibid.
[325] Enyeart, "Darrington: Sixth Timber Bowl Staged At Darrington—Large Crowd."
[326] Whiteside and Fecht, interview.

According to Hazel Holm, local Darrington columnist for the Arlington Times, "The 1962 Timber Bowl brought for the first time to the State of Washington an old-fashioned Fiddler's Convention, so well-known to the people of the mid-west and east."[327] While evidence suggests that fiddle contests were well-known to western Washington, exhibiting fiddlers of various cultural backgrounds, the new event marked a distinct turn toward the fiddler's conventions held in North Carolina, and other parts of the mountain South. These functions typically provide an outlet for like-minded musicians to gather, network, and play music informally, which often supersedes their value as a competition, or exhibition of skill. The new event was well-received, attracting many of the area's Tar Heel musicians, along with a wide array of participants from Seattle and elsewhere in Pacific Northwest. Several categories, in addition to fiddle, were open to competition, with the winners selected by audience response, rather than a panel of judges. Among those registered for the inaugural year were several names that appear elsewhere in this project. These include banjoists Irwin Nash and Roy Caudill, of Seattle, and Fred McFalls, of Darrington. On fiddle, Roger Wheeler and his brother, Bob, of Seattle; Bill O'Connor, then of Mt. Vernon; and George Bowman, of Darrington. The string band category included the Carolina Mountain Boys, with an eight-year-old Janie McFalls signed up to perform the Tar Heel Stomp, a variation of the traditional dance style referred to elsewhere as flatfooting, clogging, or buck dancing. Other performances included guitar, accordion, piano, and steel guitar, as well as gospel singing groups.[328] A large crowd, upwards of 1,500 people, was on hand at the Darrington Community Center to witness the event, where Fred McFalls earned first-place for his banjo playing, while his Carolina Mountain Boys were named the top string band. Most notably,

[327] Hazel Holm, "Darrington," *Arlington Times*, May 9, 1963, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[328] "Interest In Fiddlers' Contest," *Arlington Times*, June 21, 1962, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.

competing in the male-dominated instrument categories, Vivian Williams took home first-place honors on fiddle.[329]

The following year saw the addition of an expanded rodeo, which took place at the municipal airport, on land leased from the town.[330] Formed in 1962, the Darrington Horse Owners Association held an amateur-only rodeo during that year's Timber Bowl. Taking place a day after the fiddler's convention, and similarly well-received, the 1963 event saw the addition of bleachers, expanded parking, a larger refreshment stand, and an improved public address system, featuring "western music" performances throughout the show.[331] The rodeo would overtake the Timber Bowl in later years, playing a significant role in the development of Darrington's bluegrass community. In 1970, the Horse Owners Association purchased a 20-acre tract of land three miles west of town, along State Route 530, with plans to erect an arena, clubhouse, and racetrack.[332] The site became the first home of the Darrington Bluegrass Festival when it debuted in 1977 and remained so for several years. In the 1980s, the Darrington Bluegrass and Country Music Makers Association purchased a tract of land immediately adjacent to the rodeo grounds, eventually constructing an outdoor amphitheater, where the festival continues to entertain crowds decades later.[333] As of 2021, the Timber Bowl Rodeo is still held at the Darrington Rodeo Grounds.

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[329] Hazel Holm, "Darrington: Timber Bowl," *Arlington Times*, July 5, 1962, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[330] Ruth M. Headley, "Darrington News: Horse Owners plan new home for club," *Arlington Times*, December 3, 1970, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[331] Hazel Holm, "Darrington: Rodeo To Be Timber Bowl Feature," *Arlington Times*, May 15, 1963, SmallTownPapers: Newspaper Archive of The Arlington Times.
[332] Ruth M. Headley, "Darrington News: Horse Owners plan new home for club."
[333] "Darrington Bluegrass Festival," Destination Darrington, accessed January 28, 2021, https://www.destinationdarrington.com/index.php/event/darrington-bluegrass-festival.

CHAPTER 7. PHIL AND VIVIAN

Before embarking on this project, I casually spoke with several friends who had some familiarity with the Seattle bluegrass scene, and who might be able to help me hone the focus of my research. Without fail, I always heard some version of, "You have to talk to Phil and Vivian." Referred to as a single entity, mentions of "Phil and Vivian" were a continuing theme throughout my research. It did not take long to realize that they would be a critical resource, not only for their first-hand knowledge of the Tar Heel bluegrass community, but also for their immense contributions to the development of bluegrass and other forms of folk music in the Pacific Northwest. This chapter introduces Phil and Vivian, along with the area's folk music scene as they became involved in the 1950s.

Vivian Williams

Vivian Williams was born to Warren and Jeanette Tomlinson in Tacoma, Washington, in 1938. Her parents were both well educated, but came from strikingly different backgrounds. Warren was raised in Hutchinson, Minnesota, the son of a farmer, before completing his bachelor's degree at Carleton College (Northfield, Minnesota) in just three years. After college, he spent time in the Philippines teaching English to the Moro people, which Vivian speculates may have been a missionary venture, as her father was raised "a very staunch Methodist." Her mother, Jeanette, was born in Storozhynets, Ukraine, a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire at the time. Vivian's grandmother ended up marrying a traveling shoe salesman, and the family moved to Berlin. Seeking a good education, Jeanette ultimately enrolled at Berliner Abendgymnasium, which was similar to a community college, and considered a "very radical

institution" at the time. This is where she met Warren, who had taken a teaching job there in the late 1920s.[334]

After getting married, Vivian's parents travelled to Minnesota to visit Warren's family. While they were in the United States, Hitler rose to power in Germany, prompting Jeanette's mother to write them, saying, "Don't come back!" With their plans of settling in Berlin vanquished, and the harsh Minnesota winter proving too much for Jeanette, Warren was able to land a job at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington. Though working for a Methodist institution, Vivian isn't sure how committed her father was to the Methodist practice, saying, "I never talked to him about religion. He was obviously more of a free-thinker than his ancestors." For her mother, Vivian believes the transition from a major European cultural hub like Berlin to a "provincial, small town" like 1930s Tacoma must have been a major adjustment. "Europe was cool, America was kind of crass, and you know...my mom was a total cultural snob."[335]

While Tacoma may not have been the cultural hotspot Jeanette was accustomed to, such limitations did not prevent music from playing an important role in Vivian's life from a young age. In one of our conversations, she outlined the three "roots" of folk music awareness, which ultimately foreshadowed her involvement with the mid-century folk revival during her college years and beyond.[336] First, a concept of "The Folk" was popular in Germany during her parents' time in Berlin, an expression of the romantic nationalism that had swept across Europe during the nineteenth century.[337] "It was this totally romantic thing, and this very European kind of thing. But at least we had the concept." The next factor involved her father's harmonica playing,

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[334] Williams, interview.
[335] Ibid.
[336] Ibid.
[337] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 274.

which included familiar tunes like “Turkey in the Straw,” “Oh Susanna,” and “Golden Slippers”—traditional melodies that Vivian would learn on the harmonica as well. “At the time, I didn’t recognize that that was folk music or anything—that was just some stuff that my dad did.” Finally, she began taking violin lessons in the fourth grade. As she continued into junior high school, a teacher gave her a book of fiddle tunes to learn from. Featuring tunes like “Devil’s Dream” and “Lamplighter’s Hornpipe,” she approached the material as a collection of etudes, or vehicle to improve her overall technique, but did not yet have a frame of reference for traditional fiddle music in general. Vivian offered a humorous anecdote from this time, telling me that one day during orchestra class, the teacher stopped the rehearsal, pointed to her, and said, “Vivian, stop tapping your foot, because you look like some kind of old-time fiddler!” Of course, it was intended as an insult—“I was totally mortified!”[338]

There were some records around the house when Vivian was growing up, including some by Richard Dyer-Bennet. These may have informed her understanding of folk music during high school, but do not seem to have captured her imagination. Though she wouldn’t fully discover bluegrass music until she reached college, she did share a memory of what must have been one of her earliest encounters with the music of Bill Monroe. As a college professor, Vivian’s father had the summers off, and after World War II, he took a summer job at Mount Rainier National Park as a night watchman. While their mother worked in the gift shop, Vivian and her sister were left to their own devices. “I do remember on the jukebox at Paradise Lodge they had ‘Footprints in the Snow’ (Bill Monroe). And again, that was just something that was on the jukebox—I didn’t know bluegrass or country or anything, it was just a song that was on the jukebox.”[339]

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[338] Williams, interview.
[339] Ibid.

Reed College

In 1955, Vivian moved to Portland, Oregon to attend Reed College, where she studied history. Alongside the University of California, Berkeley, Reed was considered a west coast bellwether of the folk music revival, which was just gaining momentum in the mid-1950s. Major revival figures like Pete Seeger, Guy Carawan, and Odetta each performed at Reed during this time period, finding receptive audiences on the progressive college campuses of the west coast. This is also where Vivian would meet Phil Williams, her partner in music and life.[340]

Phil was born and raised in Olympia, Washington, where his father worked for an insurance company. His parents had relocated to Seattle after attending the University of Montana together in Missoula, where they were married. Phil's mother was born to a Jewish mercantile family in Helena, Montana, and was a "liberated woman of her time," according to Vivian. She finished school in Missoula and enrolled at the University of Washington after their move to Seattle, where she pursued a degree in marketing. Phil's father was originally from Kentucky, moving to a town near Helena, Montana, at age twelve when Phil's grandfather took a job guarding a railroad trestle used to transport ore from the mines during World War I, while the country was under the threat of German sabotage. A multi-instrumentalist, Phil's father played in a jazz band called the Montana Ramblers, who were hired as the orchestra aboard Japan-bound ocean liner S.S. President Jefferson in the 1920s. Traveling through the Port of Seattle en route to Japan, Phil's father was left with a positive impression of the city, which ultimately prompted their relocating to Seattle after college.[341]

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[340] Ibid.
[341] Ibid.

Like Vivian, Phil was introduced to music at a young age. He learned his first guitar techniques from his father, who himself played fingerstyle and swing, along with trombone and accordion. Some of his father's Kentucky roots must have been passed along as well, evidenced by an anecdote Vivian shared with me from a folk festival they attended in the 1970s. While they were jamming, someone approached Phil and said, "Hey, you're a Kentucky guitar player, aren't you?" Phil said, "Well, my dad was from Kentucky and I learned from him, so I guess I am." As Vivian explained, "There was something about his flatpick guitar playing that was somehow derived from the Kentucky background, even though his dad was a fingerpicker and a swing player. So, I can't tell you what's going on there. Some weird subtlety." Kentucky has a well-established history of "thumbpicking," associated with Merle Travis and others, and it's possible some elements of this style carried through in Phil's playing.[342]

Back at Reed, Phil and Vivian were soon swept up in the folk revival, which would ultimately mark a major turn in their lives. "Phil dragged me to my first Pete Seeger concert, so that was my first real acquaintance with the folk music revival, per se," Vivian recalled. Others in the local music community were beginning to take interest in old time banjo playing, and according to Vivian, "Phil just completely got sucked into the whole banjo thing." At this point, he was primarily focused on the up-picking style, a traditional banjo technique that was popularized by Pete Seeger. Vivian began dabbling with folk music as well, but did not yet apply it to her background in classical violin. "At the time, I didn't make any connection between my violin playing and fiddle music, because I didn't have a clue about fiddle music, in spite of the little hints I'd gotten along the way. I didn't know—so I figured, okay, I played a little banjo, and

[342] Ibid.

I played a little bit of mandolin, and I messed around on guitar, and we would have little folk singing sessions at school. But I didn't do anything with a fiddle."[343]

When I asked Vivian about her musical preferences during this time period, and what drew her toward the music of the folk revival, it became clear that multiple factors were at play. On whether her progressive political views may have attracted her to folk music, which is so often associated with populism and the working class, she acknowledged that it may have played a role early on, but was not a driving factor as she dug deeper into bluegrass and other forms of traditional music. Another factor may have been her aversion to the mainstream pop music of the day, which was strongly influenced by her upbringing. "I never liked popular music," Vivian explained. "That was part of my mom's big European snobbery thing. You know, European classical music is wonderful, and European folk music is cool, and American folk music, whatever that is, is probably cool, except we didn't have any concept of it. But American popular music is evil. Bad! Nasty! Crass!" She laughs. "I have very mixed feelings about popular music, and always have had."[344]

I went on to ask her about country music, specifically, which has always been a complicated subject with regard to the folk revival. On the one hand, depending on how its defined, it can be considered the antecedent for bluegrass, and at the very least, part of the same family. On the other hand, many of the commercial aspects of popular music that turned off certain listeners, like Vivian, were very much at play in the country music industry during that same period. The music of Hank Williams would have been acceptable, but not so much the lush string arrangements of Chet Atkins' "Nashville Sound." Still new to the concept of bluegrass, Vivian spoke to some of the difficulty, then and now, of reconciling bluegrass and country as

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[343] Ibid.
[344] Ibid.

closely-related, but distinct, genres. "At the time, I didn't really understand that bluegrass was just another flavor of old-fashioned country music. I didn't have that perspective. I sort of did, but I didn't, you know. It's really hard. It's actually hard right now, even with all the perspective of so many years, to define what the relationship between bluegrass and other more old-fashioned country musics is, because it's not real clear. And at the time, it was even less clear, because we had less knowledge, and then less of the perspective from the passage of time."[345]

Settling in Seattle

Phil graduated from Reed in 1958, and Vivian followed suit a year later. They were married in September 1959. After college, Phil enlisted in the Army, and was soon stationed at Fort Lawton, a small military outpost on Seattle's Magnolia Bluff, and the site of present-day Discovery Park. Vivian enrolled in graduate school at the University of Washington, where she pursued an advanced degree in Anthropology.[346] Firmly settled in Seattle, they quickly began fostering the relationships that would help establish a lasting bluegrass community in the greater Pacific Northwest.

Through Vivian's involvement with the University of Washington Anthropology department, they heard about a party happening at John Ashford's house in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood, which was going to involve some of the local folk music community.[347] It was there they met Irwin Nash, which proved to be a critical moment in the history of Northwest bluegrass. A photographer and musician, Irwin was taken with the banjo, and would not only

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[345] Ibid.
[346] Ibid.
[347] Williams, interview; Nash, interview.

introduce Phil and Vivian to bluegrass music, but to the bluegrass community taking shape just up the road in Darrington.

"We just hit it off," Irwin recalls. "Phil and I had interest in audio, and when I met them, they were playing round back mandolins, sitting on the couch—I can still see it in my mind's eye. And we hit it off, and Phil would come over, and he'd show me some of the audio gear he had and banjos, and it sort of started from there."[348]

Irwin's first contact with folk music, and the banjo, occurred at a Pete Seeger concert, which he attended in his late teens. "I really dug the banjo." He learned about Seeger's famous book, *How to Play the 5-string Banjo*, found a copy, and began learning on a cheap Kay banjo. Around this time, he met another local banjo enthusiast named Eric Sackheim, who had done some field work in the South, and was in graduate school at the University of Washington. Sackheim showed Irwin how to play "Skip to My Lou," a traditional dance number.[349] Hungry for more music in this vein, Irwin began borrowing recordings from the library and exchanging tape dubbings with friends.

Dating back to the early 1950s, Gordon Tracie owned a record shop in the Pike Place Market, later moving to the corner of University Way and NE 41st Street in Seattle's University District.[350] Born and raised on Bainbridge Island, directly across Puget Sound from Seattle, Tracie was a "legendary dance teacher and researcher on Scandinavian music," according to Vivian. He held a broad interest in traditional music, including bluegrass and country, and founded the Skandia Folkdance Society in 1949, intent on preserving and promoting traditional

[348] Nash, interview.
[349] Nash, interview.
[350] Nash, interview.

Nordic music and dance.[351] At the time, Tracie's Folklore Center was likely the only record store in the Northwest carrying a reliable supply of bluegrass records. For the Darrington Tar Heel community, not usually inclined to make frequent visits to Seattle, the opportunity to buy bluegrass records was enough to draw them into the city. As Irwin told me, "The folks from Darrington—Fred McFalls, Ben Bryson, and the Chastain Brothers—would come down in the fall and buy a winter's worth full of 78s of country and bluegrass music, and they would go up to Darrington and get snowed in for the winter."[352]

When Tracie decided to relocate the Folklore Center to the University District, he held a grand opening celebration that involved closing University Way and setting up an outdoor stage. Among the featured performers were the Carolina Mountain Boys, which included McFalls, Bryson, and the Chastains.[353] According to Phil Williams, "This is likely the first time that anyone in the urban areas of the Northwest heard live bluegrass from a local band."[354] Around this same time, Tracie invited McFalls to play a concert at a monthly Pacific Northwest Folklore Society meeting. Once again, the Carolina Mountain Boys made the trek to Seattle, putting on a show for a receptive audience of urban folk enthusiasts. Irwin Nash was in attendance for these events, telling me, "The place went crazy—nobody had ever heard anything like that in person before."[355] Having already taken an interest in the banjo, Irwin was particularly enthralled by what he heard, especially Fred McFalls' banjo playing.

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[351] Williams, interview; Skandia Folkdance Society. "About Skandia Folkdance Society," accessed April 1, 2021, https://skandia-folkdance.org/history.html.
[352] Nash, interview.
[353] Williams, interview.
[354] Phil Williams, "Early Bluegrass in Western Washington and the Pacific Northwest: A personal account by Phil Williams." Voyager Recordings & Publications, accessed January 6, 2019, https://www.voyagerrecords.com/arNWBG.htm.
[355] Nash, interview.

After meeting Phil and Vivian at the Ashford house party, Irwin introduced Phil to the bluegrass banjo style of Earl Scruggs and others. Among the records they passed around were Flatt & Scruggs' *Foggy Mountain Banjo*, and two Mike Seeger-produced records from Folkways; *American Banjo Tunes & Songs in Scruggs Style* and *Mountain Music Bluegrass Style*.[356] Released within a few years of each other, these records were widely influential amongst the folk revival crowd, providing many with their first exposure to bluegrass music.

While Phil immediately embraced bluegrass banjo, Vivian did not initially appreciate the style of fiddling she heard on these early bluegrass records. "It was kind of 'wail-y'—to me, it sounded out of tune, because I was totally into the classical thing…it was just too wail-y and slide-y...it didn't appeal to me." Of course, her resistance would not last. "It didn't take me too long to completely reverse course on that, and the weirder and slidier and bluesier it was, the more I liked it."[357]

The record that unlocked Vivian's interest in old time and bluegrass fiddling was the Seeger Family's *American Folk Songs*. The opening track features Mike Seeger's rendition of the traditional fiddle tune, "Old Molly Hare," which happened to catch Vivian's ear. "I heard that and I thought, 'Well, that's kind of nice. I could learn to do that.' So that was the first fiddle tune that I learned as part of the revival thing." She continued to build her repertoire and sense of style from listening to records, making a complete transition from classical violinist to bluegrass and old-time fiddler. Her classical training, which she had kept up during her college days at Reed, served her well in this new pursuit. Though no longer maintaining her formal technique after moving to Seattle, Vivian explained, "I figured out a way of applying it to this new music

[356] Williams, interview.
[357] Williams, interview.

that I'd just gotten acquainted with." As evidenced by the demand for her fiddling and success in regional contests, she managed quite well.[358]

1950s Seattle Folk Scene

Irwin Nash explained that bluegrass and old-time music had yet to reach the Seattle folk community in the 1950s, which meant he had to seek it out elsewhere. "You could say that the interest in non-popular music was divided in two categories," he recalled. "There were lots of guitar players—folksinger types—who couldn't play very well, but they sang. And then you had people who were interested in instrumental music. And I didn't hang around the folk singers at all, but I'd go after people who knew how to play banjo and could play the stuff from the hills. As could Fred [McFalls] and his friends from North Carolina...So that's what I went after, and I listened to a lot of Library of Congress field recordings." Interested in finding banjo players he could learn from, Irwin began going to local music shops, where he would ask who was buying banjo strings.[359]

Vivian confirmed that, upon her and Phil's arrival—in the wake of the Kingston Trio's massive commercial success[360]—Seattle's folk scene was mostly comprised of folksingers playing in coffeehouses. This reflected the broader national trend of coffeehouses as "prime training grounds for the gathering hordes of guitar and banjo pickers."[361] As they gained their footing in the music community, however, they began to find like-minded musicians who were discovering bluegrass at the same time. "There were other people playing bluegrass outside of

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[358] Ibid.
[359] Nash, interview.
[360] Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival & American Society, 1940-1970*, 129-136.
[361] Ibid. 212.

the Darrington scene, but we didn't know them at the time...I guess you would have to call them country music people who were intrigued by bluegrass. And we got acquainted with them soon enough, you know, within a couple of years."[362] Vivian cited Dick Marvin, who lived in Kent, Washington, as one such example:

> Dick Marvin is a perfect example of that. Dick Marvin was a country music guy, and he describes the time when—he was just driving his car, you know, from somewhere to somewhere, and he had the country music radio on, and at the time, bluegrass tunes would occasionally show up on country music radio. And it was that ["Feudin' Banjos"]—the original "Dueling Banjos"...It was Don Reno and Arthur "Guitar Boogie" Smith...5-string banjo and tenor banjo...and he heard that, and it blew him away to the point where he had to pull over and stop driving, and just listen to that thing, because it completely blew his mind. And so, he got interested in playing banjo—you know, 5-string banjo—from that...So, he got into bluegrass music from that, and it was from country radio, just the occasional bluegrass things that would happen on country radio. But then, once you became aware of bluegrass, apparently you could go to a record store and, perhaps, buy the—however many, you know—ten or twelve bluegrass records that were available at the time. And so, this would have been around 1959, 1960—right around the same time we were getting into it, but it was just a completely unconnected scene. And there were a few other individuals that got into it that way, just sort of by what they heard on country music radio.[363]

[362] Williams, interview.
[363] Ibid.

CHAPTER 8. MEETING THE TAR HEELS

Irwin Nash had become acquainted with Fred McFalls through the performances Gordon Tracie organized in Seattle, and began visiting the McFalls family in Darrington. After getting to know Phil and Vivian, and realizing their shared enthusiasm for bluegrass, he told them, "You know, there are some people around here that play that kind of stuff."[364] It wasn't long before Irwin initiated a meeting, and they all loaded into a car and took off for the North Cascades. "Irwin dragged us up to Darrington, so we met Fred McFalls and Alice, his wife—she was not a musician, but she was a hell of a cook, and a nice hostess—and then Ben Bryson, who played mandolin, and was a good tenor singer. And so that's how we got involved in that scene."[365]

The young Seattleites began making regular trips to Darrington, and developed a close relationship with Fred McFalls and his family, who were at the heart of the Tar Heel bluegrass community. For this group of budding, urban bluegrass enthusiasts, who had only known the music through recordings, the ability to follow it directly to the source proved revelatory. "We would go to Fred's on Saturday or Sunday nights," Irwin told me. "They had a pot-belly stove, and it would get really warm, and about two o'clock in the morning—the music got better the longer you were at it—and I would always bug him, 'Fred, pick "Lonesome Road Blues."' And he'd hunker down and—the clouds parted. It was incredible."[366]

Irwin and the Williamses became fast friends with the McFalls family, and others in the Tar Heel community, who demonstrated what "Southern hospitality" was all about. "The neighbors who played would come in...and Alice would bring us coffee and other things. And I

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[364] Ibid.
[365] Ibid.
[366] Nash, interview.

just dug it, because it was an ambience that you couldn't create—you couldn't create a script for it. It was a real-life situation, two or three generations old." A skilled photographer, Irwin would sometimes bring his camera to the gatherings, but other times, he would simply take the opportunity to appreciate his surroundings, never out of earshot of Fred's banjo. "I would bring a banjo up, and would pick a little bit, but I just sat around and soaked in the incredible music. Because Fred was incredibly good."[367]

Fred and Alice McFalls' daughter, Janie, shared some of her memories, having grown up with these jam sessions happening in her home most weekends. Though the McFalls family had a small house, there could be upwards of twenty-five people, or more, with jams happening simultaneously in the living room, kitchen, and sometimes outside. Many of the pickers that would show up were not from Darrington, instead coming from the Seattle area, or from the other Tar Heel outposts further north in the Skagit Valley. Janie told me Alice very much enjoyed having the music around the house and would cook in shifts to feed everyone. She even wrote out the words to hundreds of songs that singers could reference if they knew the tune. On weekends when they didn't have people over, Fred would go pick at someone else's house, if he didn't have to work a double shift at the mill. Alice would often gather the kids and ride along just to enjoy the music.[368] Once again, Alice's efforts are revealed as a critical aspect of these significant gatherings.

Aside from Fred McFalls, Vivian cited Ben Bryson, Roy Morgan, and Earl Jones as some of the prominent musicians in the early 1960s Darrington bluegrass community, in addition Harley Worthington and Hank English, who would come up from the Everett area. Chuck Martin is another name that came up in several conversations, described by Irwin Nash as an

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[367] Ibid.
[368] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.

"incredible" Monroe-style mandolin player who played with Phil and Vivian, as well as the Darrington crowd.[369] A fellow Tar Heel, Martin lived further north, near Sumas, Washington, and according to Janie, attended school with Alice McFalls while growing up in North Carolina.[370] Paul Wiley, a native Kentuckian, was also frequently mentioned as one of the finest bluegrass banjo players on the scene. Rich Jones, who was good friends with him, would go visit Wiley when he was living in Lynnwood, Washington later on. "He was probably the best banjo player in the Northwest at the time...I'd go down and I'd play guitar and just back Paul up. And it'd take him about a half hour to get his fingers, but boy, he could really play."[371]

Roy Caudill, an older banjo player who lived in North Seattle, was another important member of the community. Irwin Nash had a close relationship with Caudill and interviewed him about his life and music as part of a series of films produced by local television station KCTS and the Seattle Folklore Society.[372] Irwin also made a photograph of Caudill playing with frequent musical partner, and fellow North Carolinian, fiddler Henry Vanoy, which appeared on the cover of Voyager's *Comin' Round the Mountain* LP. According to the accompanying liner notes, Caudill was born near Sparta, North Carolina, in 1892, and moved west—in a covered wagon—homesteading in Montana from 1916 until he eventually settled in Seattle, in 1942, where he earned his living as a carpenter.[373] Irwin offered some insight on Caudill's banjo playing:

> [Caudill] played primarily a two-finger style that was harder to do than I thought it would be. It wasn't regular double-thumbing; it was mostly the thumb back on the fifth string and [index lead], but he also did a kind of strumming as well. He did not play

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[369] Nash, interview.
[370] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.
[371] Jones, interview.
[372] Films accessible on "Blues&Folk 1960's" YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbXR2bkWmFw4yNWCXmt8MQw.
[373] "CD 302: Comin' Round the Mountain," Voyager Recordings & Publications.

> clawhammer. He played something that was sort of a brushing down, but it wasn't clawhammer. He didn't put his thumb on the inside strings (drop-thumb technique), but he played like a clock. It was incredible. He'd been playing decades, and you could watch him, and it was just slow, even—he had complete control of what he was doing.

Caudill would also host picking parties, including a big gathering every year.[374] Many of the same musicians from Darrington, Seattle, and elsewhere would attend, as well as family and friends who did not play, but enjoyed listening to the music. Janie McFalls would sometimes accompany her father to sessions at Caudill's house and offered a humorous anecdote about the impression it left on her as a young adolescent: "Every once in a while, Della and Roy would have people over, and they came up to Darrington, too. And the reason I remember them so much is because Della, she [was] a smoker—of course, Roy was a smoker, too—but Della, she only smoked her cigarettes halfway down, and then she barely put them out."[375]

By all accounts, the Tar Heel crowd welcomed Phil and Vivian with open arms, as she explained. "Yeah! It was amazing, it was amazing. I mean, I don't know how they put up with us, but they did...We were these weird hippies, except Phil didn't have long hair, but we were still weird hippies [laughs]. But we were interested in their music and, you know, they were just really nice people."[376] It didn't hurt their case that Vivian was an excellent fiddler, and Phil had learned how to play bass—both instruments being in demand at the time. They might get called upon to fill out an impromptu band for a local show, benefitting the volunteer fire department or boy scout troop. Vivian suggested Phil's expertise in live sound may have played an even bigger role in their acceptance within the community:

> The main thing was—this is the important thing, I think, in retrospect—they really needed a PA system, because if you're going to play a benefit in some little grange hall

[374] Jones, interview.
[375] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.
[376] Williams, interview.

> somewhere, it's nice to have. And Phil was a total nutcase on PA systems. And so, they accepted us, I suppose, because we were relatively harmless and interested in their music, even though we were weird urban hippies. But they could use a bass player, and they could use a fiddle player, and they definitely needed a PA system, so we just kind of fitted in with that scene just fine, and did a lot of playing with them.[377]

Given the sociopolitical climate of the time period, it would be natural to wonder how each side navigated their cultural differences. For the most part, Vivian suggested politics and religion weren't "that big of a deal," meaning they simply weren't prominent in their interactions. Whether those subjects were considered taboo, or both sides intuitively recognized their differences in background and points-of-view, it does not seem to have tempered their musical affairs. "We realized that these people were—although they might be good hearted and all that kind of stuff—politically, in many ways, they were on the other side of the fence. And so, we realized...what you do, is you just keep your mouth shut about certain things. You don't talk religion; you don't talk politics. You talk music, and you talk family, and whatever you can find in common, and leave it at that." While Vivian recalls awkward moments where somebody might say something racially inappropriate, she explained, "They weren't real dogmatic about it—that was just kind of a way of speaking."[378] Overall, everyone seems to have been able to focus on the things they shared in common, rather than issues that may have driven them apart, which allowed many of them to develop close relationships.

Like Vivian, Irwin Nash felt the young Seattle crowd was generally well-received in Darrington. "As far as I can tell, we hit it off very well." During those early years, Phil's father owned an apartment building in Seattle's University District, where Irwin and the Williamses each had apartments. On the weekends Fred McFalls and Ben Bryson would come to visit, they

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[377] Ibid.
[378] Ibid.

would stay with Irwin, playing music all night. In between jam sessions, they took turns cooking for each other. Irwin enjoyed making French food, which they all enjoyed, and was equally fond of the Tar Heel cuisine—particularly Alice McFalls' "incredible" biscuits.[379]

Janie confirmed her parents' warm reception of the Seattle crowd, telling me that Fred and Alice loved Phil and Vivian just as much as they would have anyone from Darrington or North Carolina. Humorously, she recalls Fred trying to talk Ben Bryson into going down to the Seattle coffeehouses to play music, saying something like, "Yeah, can we go down there and pick for them beatniks or hippies?" Of course, he used the terms "beatnik" and "hippie" in a playful way. Speaking for the McFalls family, at least, Janie told me their door was always open. Fred "never met a stranger," and with Alice, "You never left the house hungry."[380]

Learning the Music

Phil and Vivian spent countless hours playing music with Fred McFalls, but did not make a formal effort to take lessons or solicit direct feedback. Instead, they learned by listening and by doing. "Phil would just hang out in the jam sessions, and he would stuff a sock or something into his banjo, so it wouldn't be loud, and he would just watch and play along. But there wasn't anything like lessons." Other Seattle musicians, like Irwin Nash, were doing the same thing at that time. "As far as fiddling, I was on my own," Vivian told me, "Their local fiddler had moved away just about the time I showed up, so I did the best I could with records and picking up stuff from wherever I could pick it up." She began incorporating the sounds she heard from recorded bluegrass fiddlers, including Mack Magaha, Paul Mullins, and Kenny Baker, although she felt

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[379] Nash, interview.
[380] McFalls-Bertalan, telephone.

Baker's fiddling was "too smooth and vibrato-y," at first. While she's likely underselling the quality of her fiddling, even in those early years, Vivian figures the Tar Heels were just happy to have a fiddler in their ranks and weren't concerned with giving critical feedback on her playing.[381]

Phil and Vivian were certainly aware of authenticity discussions within traditional music circles, and she acknowledges they felt a sense of superiority, at least early on, about learning the music directly from Southern musicians. "Around the same time that we were going up [to Darrington], there were a few other bluegrass guys sort of getting started in the area. You know, one of the examples is Paul Gillingham and his band [Willow Creek Ramblers]. And there was another band...just other people that were sort of getting into it. And we were feeling very superior because we were learning from the real source, and those guys were learning from records, or God knows what. And yes, so we were kind of, you know, stuck up about that. 'We are cooler than you guys, because we are going to the real source.' [laughs]"[382]

Although they recognized the value of learning from traditional practitioners, the Williamses made no attempt to replicate a particular Darrington bluegrass sound, viewing it instead as a form of inspiration for their own approach. Any early effort to attain a convincingly "Southern" performance style faded in time. "We got less and less interested in authenticity as time went on. Initially...we wanted to sound 'Southern,' because that was the first thing that we liked, was the Southern stuff. And it became pretty obvious that there was no way we were going to sound that 'Southern,' you know, and by then, we had gotten acquainted with a variety of

[381] Williams, interview.
[382] Ibid.

other styles...And so, we finally figured, 'To hell with it,' you know, 'It comes out the way it comes out.'"[383]

Authenticity was not the only issue of concern for revival-era musicians as they participated in cross-cultural exchange. Beginning around 1960, ethical considerations regarding cultural appropriation and exploitative practices by academic researchers, became a more frequent topic of discussion in the field of Anthropology.[384] As a graduate student in Anthropology during that time period, Vivian was well aware of these issues. She also cited the music industry's long history of exploiting black musicians, who were frequently robbed of their creative contributions to popular music, with little, if any, compensation.[385] Perry Hall addresses this recurring historical trend, tracing the arcs of Jazz, rock'n'roll, and soul musics, from their origins in black culture, to their eventual "diffusion and appropriation...as a result of contact and interaction with the dominant Euro-American culture."[386] Hall argues that, "While the white-dominated wider culture absorbs aesthetic innovation, it continues to avoid engaging or embracing the human reality, the very humanity, of those whose shared living experiences collectively created the context in which such innovation is nurtured, maintained, and supported."[387] This dehumanization and implied otherness have been equally relevant to the history of bluegrass and old time music, as evidenced by Cecelia Conway's pioneering research on the African roots of the banjo, and subsequently, string band music in America.[388]

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[383] Ibid.
[384] Bruno Nettl. *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 197.
[385] Williams, interview.
[386] Perry A. Hall, "African-American Music: Dynamics of Appropriation and Innovation," in *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, ed. Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 32.
[387] Ibid. 32-33.
[388] Cecelia Conway, "Black Banjo Songsters in Appalachia," *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1/2 (Spring-Autumn, 2003), 149-166.

Similar concerns have been raised in predominantly white Appalachian music communities, where different power dynamics are at play, involving economic disparities and a long history of sensationalized media portrayals. John Cohen experienced some of these issues firsthand over the course of his documentary work with Roscoe Holcomb in Kentucky. While Cohen "recognized early on that many people in Appalachia deeply resented their portrayals in popular culture as pathologically poor hillbillies in an otherwise prosperous nation," he still encountered resistance from Holcomb and his wife, who "expressed outrage about how Cohen portrayed her husband and their corner of Kentucky and questioned the legitimacy of images that many in the folk revival saw as beautiful documentary art and evocations of pure 'tradition.'"[389]

While acknowledging the potential for cultural appropriation in their relationship with the Tar Heel community, Vivian did not perceive any resentment or distrust. Instead, they got the impression that the Darrington folks were flattered by the interest in their music. The relationships that formed were mutually beneficial, built on a foundation of respect and admiration that seems to have been reciprocated on all sides. Vivian summarized their relationship with her trademark humor, explaining that they were friends, musical collaborators, *and* "exploiters of their music."[390] From the Darrington perspective, none of the individuals I spoke to—specifically Rich Jones and Janie McFalls-Bertalan—raised any concerns about the Seattle crowd's involvement with the music, instead highlighting the friendships they established with the Williamses over the years.

In the post-Folk Revival era, Bluegrass and old time have frequently been handled as separate genres, with musicians often choosing to focus on one more than the other. Weissman

[389] Scott L. Matthews, *Capturing the South: Imagining America's Most Documented Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 116-117.
[390] Williams, interview.

confirms this divide, which persists today, stating, "By the end of the 1960s, bluegrass and old-time musicians separated themselves into different camps, and there was relatively little interaction between them."[391] For the Darrington musicians, having been exposed to the music all their lives, there was little distinction. "Bluegrass" might imply faster tempos and a specific way of playing the banjo—three-finger, Scruggs-style—but otherwise, exclusionary genre labels were of limited importance. As such, Phil and Vivian saw no conflict in embracing old time and bluegrass simultaneously. "There was no contradiction there, because the Darrington people didn't see that as two different kinds of music," Vivian explained. "It was like—'this is our music.' And there was this old-fashioned way of playing the banjo, and then there was the more modern, Scruggs-style of playing the banjo, and other than that, it was all exactly the same."[392]

As the Northwest bluegrass community continued to take shape, the blurred lines between bluegrass and old time seemed to persist. Vivian offered a very practical explanation, suggesting that the relatively limited number of musicians in the area made it difficult to implement rigid genre boundaries. "When there's fewer people doing it, you don't have the luxury of dividing it into sects," she told me. "You want a fiddler? You get whatever fiddler you can find. You want a banjo player? You gotta take what's there. And so...you're forced to interact with the other folks."[393] There are always exceptions to the rule, but in general, there seems to be a sense that Northwest bluegrass and old-time musicians continue to be less-polarized than in other parts of the country.

[391] Weissman, *Which Side Are You On: An Inside History of the Folk Music Revival in America*, 99.
[392] Williams, interview.
[393] Williams, interview.

CHAPTER 9. SEATTLE BLUEGRASS SCENE TAKES SHAPE

Turkey Pluckers

Phil and Vivian teamed up with Ron Ginther (mandolin) and Mike Nelson (guitar), in 1962, to form their own string band, the Turkey Pluckers. Aside from harmony parts, neither Phil nor Vivian did much singing, leaning instead on Ginther and Nelson, who collectively knew "hundreds" of songs. "We didn't distinguish between bluegrass and old time," Vivian explained. "We sort of did both. You know, Phil played the banjo one way sometimes, and the other way sometimes, and the rest of the music was pretty much similar. And that was kind of the way the Darrington people thought of it." Drawing from his relationship with Fred McFalls, Phil was developing into a proficient Scruggs-style banjo player, incorporating the instrumentals he heard in Darrington, and from recordings of Scruggs and Don Reno. For her part, Vivian was learning a large quantity of fiddle tunes during this time.[394]

From his personal account of early bluegrass in the Northwest, Phil explains how the Turkey Pluckers came to be, and what the Seattle bluegrass scene looked like at that time:

> In 1962, during the World's Fair, a club in the basement of a building on the corner of First Avenue and Yesler Way in Seattle—"92 Yesler"—had a regular "hootenanny," as the folk gatherings were called, with an "open mike." Vivian and I had been playing in our living room with Mike Nelson, who was in the Navy, stationed at Sand Point. Mike knew a lot of old-time country and newer bluegrass songs, Vivian was already an established fiddler, and I was holding my own on bluegrass banjo. We showed up at the "open mike." The Cascades were there to perform, and when Ron Ginther saw us with a banjo and fiddle, he asked if we played "hillbilly" music and if he could join us. The four of us did an impromptu bluegrass set, ending with "Orange Blossom Special," and were hired on the spot to start playing at the "Place Next Door," a coffeehouse on 45th Avenue next to the Guild Theater. We played there every Friday and Saturday night for the next thirteen weeks, not repeating a tune we had done before on Friday nights, and putting together sets of the tunes that worked for Saturday. A lot of the bluegrass musicians in

[394] Williams, interview.

> the area came down and joined in—Dick Marvin, Roger Wheeler, Conrad Stoneburner, Harley Worthington, Hank English, Chuck Green, Barbara Hug (who was learning bluegrass banjo—unheard-of for women at that time), and others I can't remember. The place was mobbed. Almost immediately the nylon string guitars started disappearing and folks got Martin D-28s, banjos, mandolins, Dobros, fiddles, etc., and the rush to form bluegrass bands to play in the coffeehouses was on. One of the first bands to form in this period, that was one of the longest running bluegrass bands in the Pacific Northwest, was the "Willow Creek Ramblers"—Paul Gillingham, Phil Poth and Don McAllister...After the World's Fair, a televised "Northwest Hootenanny" program was broadcast from the Horiuchi Mural at the Seattle Center. Our band, the "Turkey Pluckers," was a regular on that show, became very popular, and we had to join the Musicians Union as a part of the quota of Union performers required of the Seattle Center.[395]

Around 1965, Phil and Vivian formed another bluegrass band, which included Paul Wiley on banjo. Up until this point, the banjo was Phil's primary focus, but with this group, he began to shift toward the mandolin. "We had this band that had, actually, three banjo players in it, and two of them were better than Phil, you know. And so, Phil played banjo less often, and then he was doing more and more on the mandolin...He never really did get more mainline in his bluegrass banjo playing, because he was almost not doing banjo by about, let's say [1966 or 1967]."[396]

In the late 1960s, the Williamses organized Tall Timber, which became one of the prominent bands on the Northwest bluegrass scene for the next decade. With Vivian on fiddle and Phil on mandolin, other regular members included Dick Marvin (guitar), Barney Munger (banjo), and Lou Harrington (bass). Tall Timber was not a major touring band, as most members had day jobs, but they were regulars on the Northwest festival circuit, and were an institution at the Inside Passage, a club in Seattle's Pioneer Square, which served as the hub of the 1970s bluegrass scene.[397]

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[395] Williams, "Early Bluegrass in Western Washington and the Pacific Northwest: A personal account by Phil Williams."
[396] Williams, interview.
[397] Ibid.

Primarily a tavern, the Inside Passage had a separate performance space with a capacity of about 250 people.[398] "The musicians actually ran the entertainment on their own...and we got the cover charge," as Vivian recalled, "Which, I believe, was a dollar or two dollars, or something ridiculously low. So, the people at the bar just gave us permission, and we went through several owners, and the scene just continued, and so, we had something for every night of the week." Tall Timber played every other Friday, alternating with the Willow Creek Ramblers, and other bands filled out the rest of the schedule, including Mountain County Co-op, Bellingham's Southfork Bluegrass Band, and Portland's Puddle City. The Seattle contra dance scene also grew out of the Passage, beginning as a weekly square dance, organized by Sherry Nevins.[399] Regularly drawing large crowds, the Inside Passage served as a launching point for Northwest bands, helping to establish their reputations on a regional scale.

Tall Timber was also frequently heard on KRAB-FM, a non-commercial, educational radio station in Seattle, which operated from 1962 to 1984. Amidst an eclectic mix of spoken word and music programming, bluegrass began featuring on KRAB in 1964, with a bi-weekly program hosted by the Turkey Plucker's Ron Ginther. Beginning the last week of 1968, James "Tiny" Freeman brought his colorful personality and penchant for old time and bluegrass music to KRAB, hosting a program that became a fixture on Saturday nights into the early 1970s. Often featuring live performances from local musicians, Phil Williams credits Freeman's show as a "major push" for the Seattle bluegrass scene in the 1960s. From his personal account, Phil explains that, "The quality of this program and the informality of these presentations helped

[398] Williams, "Early Bluegrass in Western Washington and the Pacific Northwest: A personal account by Phil Williams."
[399] Williams, interview.

create a feeling that folks did not have to play bluegrass to be included in a very friendly 'bluegrass community.'"[400]

Through their involvement with the Inside Passage, KRAB-FM, and other important institutions, Tall Timber played an important role in establishing Seattle's bluegrass scene, which gained serious traction by the 1970s. As the decade progressed, an increasing number of young musicians began to form bands, building on the foundation set by Tall Timber and other pioneering groups, like the Turkey Pluckers and Willow Creek Ramblers.

Phil and Vivian's House

Phil and Vivian have been hosting music gatherings from their earliest years in Seattle, when both Phil and Irwin Nash had apartments in a building owned by Phil's father in the University District. In 1965, they moved into their current home—a large house overlooking Lake Washington in Seattle's Leschi Neighborhood—which has been a hub of the local music community ever since. Traveling musicians, including Bill Monroe and Doc Watson, would often stay with the Williamses when performing in the Seattle area, as would Fred McFalls and others from the Darrington community.[401] Parties at the Williams' house left a strong impression on young musicians like Barry Brower, who explained, "Phil and Vivian's house was ground zero for just about everything that was happening. There was always people there, always musicians—from everywhere."[402]

> Phil used to have a brass bed in his guest room—a little single brass bed that he had in there—I've slept in it many, many times. I've slept in it, Ralph Stanley has slept in it, Bill Monroe has slept in it, Doc Watson has slept in it, Tommy Jarrell has slept in it—you

[400] Williams, "Early Bluegrass in Western Washington and the Pacific Northwest: A personal account by Phil Williams."
[401] Williams, interview.
[402] Brower, interview.

> know, everybody. It's the 'Bed to the Stars,' or something, you know? That's because, at one time or another, if you came to Seattle, or even if you were from Seattle, you ended up staying with them.[403]

Prior to relocating to Washington, Barry was involved with the northern California bluegrass community, which was part of a loose network of developing scenes that stretched from San Francisco to Seattle. Some of his friends in Arcata, California, where he was living at the time, were already good friends with Phil, Vivian, and some of the other Seattle bluegrassers. Barry met some of them himself during early visits to Seattle, including a Seattle Folklore Society concert with Fickle Hill, the Arcata-based bluegrass band he played with throughout the 1970s. Other west coast musicians were forging connections at regional festivals, like the Northwest Folklife Festival in Seattle, and the National Old Time Fiddlers' Contest in Weiser, Idaho, which Barry described as a "melting pot" for west coast musicians. "That's where a lot of us have had a major connection with each other."[404]

Barry spoke at length about the New Year's parties at Phil and Vivian's house, which he would travel from Arcata to attend, immersing himself in the near-constant jam sessions for several days. "It was great fun. I mean, you know, I could never pull that off now, I'm too old for that, but at the time, it was just around-the-clock fun."[405] The music and socializing would be interspersed with shared meals and tourist outings during the day. Describing the typical scene, Barry included a particularly strong memory centered around Hank and Harley of the Tennesseans:

> People would show up with their instruments, and there would be lots of socializing, of course, and then people would move off into individual rooms and just jam. And it was just totally laissez-faire...The parties that we had over New Year's, I mean they were just about twenty-four seven things. And I remember the first time I came up there, I was up

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[403] Ibid.
[404] Ibid.
[405] Ibid.

> in that room I told you about, with the brass bed, it was like two or three in the morning, and I was like, 'I've been playing all day long, I've got to get some sleep.' And hearing Harley Worthington and Hank [English] going at it full blast. I mean, we're talking rock 'em sock 'em bluegrass, three o'clock in the morning, they've been playing since noon. And they're still going—you can hear them through eight walls in that house! And I remember going to sleep one night, hearing that banjo, and Hank with that really—you know, he had a Lester Flatt, but tenor kind of voice, and he had the accent and the whole works. And it just sounded like we were sitting right there in the middle of Appalachia.[406]

Musical activity at the Williams' house was not limited to special events or holidays. John Ullman, a close friend, who was among the co-founders of the Seattle Folklore Society, described the setting on a typical weeknight in the late 1960s:

> Vivian would be playing music in the dining room with a bunch of fiddle players. Somebody else would be raiding their 78 collection in the living room, recording interesting 78s...Phil would be up in his office, helping a friend, maybe with a divorce or something, you know, exercising his legal expertise. And then, he'd be running down to the basement to help somebody else who was building a banjo neck. Then, maybe somebody else had an amplifier problem, or a camera problem, and Phil would be helping with that. So, it was like a three-ring circus going on in this house every night.[407]

John reminisced about buying a National guitar for twenty-five dollars, a significant amount of money for him at the time. It was set up Hawaiian-style, with a square neck, but John wanted to play it like his blues heroes—Spanish-style, with a bottleneck slide and a round neck. Phil says, "Well, we can fix that." He proceeded to whittle it down in five minutes with a spokeshave. Another time, John helped Phil repair a Leica camera, describing it as the only time he was ever able to be useful to Phil—a nod to Phil's resourcefulness. Vivian, meanwhile, was also busy hosting a quilting group, and both her and Phil were in the midst of starting their Voyager Records label, which included building a recording studio in the basement. Per John,

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[406] Ibid.
[407] John Ullman and Irene Namkung, interview by author, Seattle, January 11, 2018.

"They epitomized this idea of 'If there's something to do, or a problem, it obviously can be dealt with quickly and efficiently.'"[408]

Before I first interviewed Vivian, I dropped in on the monthly fiddle jam held in her living room, which she and Phil started hosting in 2002, along with fellow Northwest fiddler, Stuart Williams (no relation). Open to players of all skill levels, the circle routinely includes twenty or more musicians on various instruments, each taking turns calling tunes. During a break from the music, I had the opportunity to meet several local musicians, including esteemed banjo player, Harley Bray, who lent his voice to this project. It was clear that after more than fifty years, the Williams' house remains a central gathering point for Seattle's acoustic music community.

[408] Ibid.

CHAPTER 10. ORGANIZING THE MUSIC

Seattle Folklore Society

In August 1966, a group of friends and music enthusiasts gathered at John Ullman and Irene Namkung's house in Seattle to discuss the possibility of organizing concerts with some of their favorite traditional musicians. Several of them had been making the long drive to attend shows in Portland, Oregon, where a bustling folk scene had emanated from Reed College since the 1950s. But rather than continue to spend considerable time and money traveling to Portland, they realized they might be better served pooling their resources and bringing the same artists up to Seattle. Thus, the idea for the Seattle Folklore Society was born.[409]

John and Irene have enjoyed a long career in the arts, notably through their artist management firm, Traditional Arts Services, which grew out of their involvement with the Seattle Folklore Society in 1974. With help from friend Mike Seeger, they were able to compile a roster of folk luminaries, beginning with Elizabeth Cotten, and expanding to include Queen Ida, Bill Monroe, Flaco Jimenez, Rose Maddox, Bessie Jones, and many others from varied musical traditions. Through funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, they would also collaborate with Seeger to produce the American Old Time Music Festival series from 1975 to 1978. John and Irene handled the bookkeeping, while Mike served as director and curator of the touring festival, presenting master musicians from a variety of traditional genres. Ranging from the acapella black gospel group, Sweet Honey in the Rock, to pioneering Tejano singer and guitarist, Lydia Mendoza, the American Old Time Music Festivals represented the first

[409] Williams, interview.

opportunity for many west coast audiences to experience these traditional musical forms firsthand.[410]

I had the opportunity to speak with John and Irene at their home in Seattle, learning about each of their musical backgrounds that led to their roles as co-founders of the Seattle Folklore Society. Irene, who is also a noted potter, was born in Shanghai in 1943 to a Japanese mother and Korean father, which she described as a very controversial relationship in that culture and time. As refugees in the aftermath of World War II, they eventually settled in Seattle in 1949. Her parents, Johsel and Mineko,[411] were both professional musicians, and enrolled Irene in formal piano lessons at a young age. She would not discover American folk music until she went to college.[412] Through her work with Seattle Folklore Society and Traditional Arts Services, Irene deserves recognition as another woman who was critical to the development of bluegrass and other traditional musics in western Washington.

John Ullman's background was quite different, growing up in 1940s and 1950s Cleveland, Ohio, where he was tuned into the local rock'n'roll radio station. Hearing the likes of Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, and Bo Diddley, John likened the radio of his era to the internet of today, in the way a "child could find stuff that was totally beyond his ethnic experience." While his parents preferred the likes of Gilbert and Sullivan and other classical music, his exposure to rock'n'roll and rhythm'n'blues was his own choice and changed his view of what music was all about. As a teenager, he bought a harmonica at a music store and learned "Oh, Susanna" out of a

[410] Ullman and Namkung, interview.
[411] Johsel Namkung was a renowned landscape photographer in the Northwest. Information on his work can be found at https://www.cs.washington.edu/art/JohselNamkung.
[412] Ullman and Namkung, interview.

book while his parents were out of town. Motivated by the desire to make music, he eventually learned how to play blues harmonica well enough to participate in local jam sessions.[413]

Like Phil and Vivian Williams a few years before them, John and Irene's arrival at Reed College in 1961 proved to be a revelatory experience. And just as Phil and Vivian's musical world changed course when Irwin Nash introduced them to bluegrass, John and Irene would share a similar experience when they met Barry Hansen, whose career they would later manage under the stage name Dr. Demento. A music student and contributor to the influential folk music fanzine, *The Little Sandy Review*, Hansen was well-known around campus for introducing fellow students to obscure folk music they may have never otherwise heard. Operating out of the same dorm complex at Reed, Hansen loaded John up with records from the New Lost City Ramblers, Bill Monroe, Robert Johnson, and most significantly, the *Anthology of American Folk Music*, often casually referred to as the "Harry Smith Anthology." As John told me, this collection was ubiquitous at the time, exposing a generation of young college students to traditional music they never knew existed. Irene, meanwhile, was enthralled by Mike Seeger's debut solo album, *Old Time Country Music*, spending a whole summer listening to it and learning to play the tunes.[414]

In 1963, they met Phil and Vivian, who were playing a show at the Way Out club in Portland with their band, the Turkey Pluckers. They all shared mutual friends in the music community, notably Phil's brother, Robert, who was a student at Reed at the time. Another important connection John and Irene made during this time was that of Mike Russo and Ron Brentano, who were major players in the Portland folk scene during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Together, they played old time, bluegrass, and blues, with Russo being particularly adept with the music of Leadbelly. From John's perspective, "[Mike] was the only person I've ever

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[413] Ibid.
[414] Ibid.

met in my life that really understood Leadbelly, even maybe more than Pete Seeger." In addition to his remarkable guitar playing, Russo was also known as a master sign painter.[415]

John and Irene met Russo during a gathering at Brentano's house. Russo had become immersed in blues music as a teenager, traveling to the black neighborhood in North Portland on Sundays to play with the musicians there. He was also a good friend and student of Brownie McGhee's who, along with longtime musical partner Sonny Terry, had just wrapped up a tour on the West Coast. "[Brentano] just happened to have Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee staying there," Irene told me. "And we barged in and saw them in his living room."[416] John further described the experience and the impact it had on him:

> Sonny and Brownie were touring, and they came to Reed our freshman year, and I don't think we went to see them. And then our sophomore year—I was taking guitar lessons from the son of another prominent artist, John Bunz, who was teaching at Portland Music—and one night, Bunz called me up, he says—he knew I had like a [Volkswagen] Bug, right?—and he says, 'I need a ride over to Ron Brentano's. If you can come up with a half-gallon jug of wine, and pick me up and drive me over there, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee are staying there!' And so, they were staying overnight at Brentano's. They had just finished a tour. And I said, 'Well, you know, I've got a Chemistry test tomorrow, I don't think I should do that.' [Laughs] Well, you can guess what we did. So, we go over there, and Sonny and Brownie are passed out in a couple of armchairs—they were asleep. And Mike and Ron were playing at, you know, three thousand decibels. They were sound asleep. And about a half an hour later, they kind of woke up, and shook themselves, and they poured themselves a tumbler of King George the Fourth Scotch, which I think was probably the cheapest Scotch you could buy. And they just drank it down—I'd never seen anything like that. And then that woke them up! It would have killed me. Then they started playing, mostly with Mike [Russo], and—it was a revelation for me, because they were playing, you know, a lot of the blues repertoire that's associated with Sonny and Brownie, and Mike was playing as an equal musician with them on the guitar. And they knew how to—when one of them would take a lead part, the other would support it, and it was like, nobody had to tell them to do that, it was very natural. And so, this whole improvisation, jamming—it was the first time I'd ever seen anything like that. And that was the first time I'd ever seen, you know, sort of 'authentic' blues music played live.[417]

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[415] Ibid.
[416] Ibid.
[417] Ibid.

While Russo seemed to be a natural talent, who could listen to a record and quickly transfer what he heard to his guitar, John was struggling to learn by ear, but saw an opportunity in being able to interact with these musicians firsthand. "I thought, if I could see these people, and maybe get some pointers from them—that, for me, was the underlying impetus to bring people up [to Seattle] and present them in concert. It was the whole reason that I was enthusiastic about starting the [Seattle] Folklore Society."[418]

Like John and Irene, Phil and Vivian were spending a lot of money to travel to Portland to see their favorite traditional musicians, which would typically entail spending the night, so they decided to put their money together and bring them up to Seattle. Both couples had prior experience producing concerts during their time at Reed. With a group assembled at John and Irene's house on Seattle's Lake Union in August 1966, everyone took turns expressing their interests and what they would like to do with this prospective group. "As people sort of wore themselves out, Phil was standing—sort of propped up against the doorway—and he says, 'Look, I'm going to tell you what to do. John, you and [Stan James] come down to my office tomorrow and we'll draw up the papers for a non-profit.'" Non-profit organizations were a new concept to the rest of the group, and John told me the wisdom of this decision wasn't immediately apparent, but eventually proved to be the vehicle that allowed them to do the things they wanted to do, like securing grant money through the National Endowment for the Arts.[419]

As a 501(c)(3) organization, the Seattle Folklore Society would sponsor the first decade of the Northwest Folklife Festival, as well as the first several years of John and Irene's artist management firm, Traditional Arts Services. The access to National Endowment for the Arts funding would help cover administrative expenses for tours of Bill Monroe, Ralph Stanley, Jim

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[418] Ibid.
[419] Ibid.

& Jesse, the Red Clay Ramblers, and more. Other projects that sprung up under the non-profit banner of the Folklore Society included Gary Ghorsha's Club House, a coffeehouse style concert hall in the University District; the Folkstore, a small folk music shop started by fiddler Frank Ferrel, and operated for many years by Stu Herrick; and Monroe Center, a larger venue housed in the Ballard neighborhood's Monroe High School building.[420]

The first Seattle Folklore Society concert was held on November 15, 1966. It was decided at the charter meeting that each member would contribute twenty dollars to bring Southern bluesmen Mance Lipscomb and Fred McDowell to the Friends Center at the University of Washington. John was able to book them with the help of Arhoolie Records' Chris Strachwitz, who played a significant role in elevating the careers of many traditional performers through his Berkeley, California-based record label.[421] Vivian told me the expectations for that first show were fairly low, but even if no one showed up, it was worth the twenty-dollar contribution to see Lipscomb and McDowell. Thanks to an article in the Seattle Times, word spread, and the concert sold out, with a line around the block waiting to get in. Fortunately, the Friends Center had a sanctuary space that they were able to use as a second room, so Lipscomb gave a show there while McDowell performed in the main room. At intermission, they switched, each room at full capacity. By the end of the night, they were able to pay the artists a substantial bonus, while using the remainder to establish the beginnings of an operating budget.[422]

Many of the performers brought in during those early years were suggested to the group by a core member who wanted to pursue a particular interest. For Phil and Vivian, it might be Bill Monroe or the New Lost City Ramblers, where John and Irene set their sights on traditional

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[420] Ibid.
[421] Ibid.
[422] Williams, interview.

blues performers. Though it must have been a daunting task to figure out how to bring all these artists out to the far reaches of the Pacific Northwest, Irene suggests they were emboldened by the can-do spirit they had been instilled with at Reed. "[That] was part of the Reed ethos—that you could always figure out a way. What the education gave you was a way to solve problems."[423]

Ultimately, Phil, Vivian, John, and Irene ended up handling most of the decision-making, while drawing on the input of others. "Most of them were happy to let us figure out who to bring in next," Vivian told me. The roster of musicians the Society would bring to Seattle over the next several years was impressive, to say the least. The New Lost City Ramblers and Bill Monroe appeared on consecutive weekends in the spring of 1967. Due to Monroe's tour bus breaking down in Texas, the bluegrass pioneer flew to Seattle with his guitarist, Doug Green, and filled out his band with Vivian (fiddle), Phil (bass), and Kentucky-native Paul Wiley, a prominent banjo player in the growing western Washington bluegrass community. Other featured performers included Reverend Gary Davis, Bukka White, Furry Lewis, Son House, Elizabeth Cotten, Jessie Fuller, Buell Kazee, Roscoe Holcomb, Ralph Stanley, and the trio of Doc Watson, Clint Howard, and Fred Price. Mississippi bluesman, Skip James, was scheduled to appear in late 1969, but died of cancer just weeks before the show was to be held.[424] Many of the artists brought in for concerts were also filmed at the KCTS Channel 9 studio on the University of Washington campus. Several of these videos have been digitized and uploaded to the "Blues&Folk 1960's" channel on YouTube.[425]

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[423] Ullman and Namkung, interview.
[424] John Ullman, "Seattle Folklore Society 40th Anniversary Part 1: The First Ten Years," Traditional Arts Services, accessed January 15, 2021, http://tradarts.com/SFS/SFS%2040th%20Slide%20Show/SFS%2040th%20for%20Web_files/frame.htm.
[425] Films accessible on "Blues&Folk 1960's" YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbXR2bkWmFw4yNWCXmt8MQw.

A particularly memorable event was the Lightnin' Hopkins concert held at Washington Hall in Seattle's Central District. While the typical Folklore Society audience was middle class and college-educated, save for the Tar Heels who would come down from Darrington for bluegrass shows, the Hopkins concert drew a more diverse crowd. Held in a historically black neighborhood, the Hopkins show was "very different," as Vivian recalled. "We had all these crazy southern black ladies, you know, just swooning all over the front of the stage. They went completely nuts. It was great, it was wonderful!" Hopkins was accompanied by Mike Russo on piano for part of the set. It was not without controversy, however, as the police arrived—twice—to shut down the show for unlawful dancing. Fortunately, thanks to Phil's legal connections, and the mediating of the venue manager, the show was allowed to continue. As the police would find, the concert was too crowded to allow for dancing anyway.[426]

The members of the Seattle Folklore Society had to confront issues of authenticity when deciding who they should—or shouldn't—bring out for a concert. Early on, everyone in the group wanted to get the New Lost City Ramblers, but as John told me, there was a concern that, "Well, we can't bring the Ramblers, because they're not really out of that culture"—speaking to the southern Appalachian culture that the Ramblers drew much of their repertoire from. John framed his definition of authenticity in this context as "musicians who were born in the communities that had the music as a 'tradition.'" He qualifies this by acknowledging that much of what "authentic" performers were doing in the present had evolved and deviated from what had been done in the past—sometimes referred to as the "folk process." John cited Mance Lipscomb as an example, having performed with an electric guitar as a practical means of being heard, dating back to the 1940s, but embraced by the folk revival community for his acoustic

[426] Williams, interview.

playing, which was perceived to be more authentic. Resisting the binary definitions of so-called "revival" and "authentic" folk music, Irene offered an analogy: "It's sort of like potters talking about whether a piece is an art piece, or whether it's functional. I don't see the distinction at all." So, when it came to deciding whether they should bring the New Lost City Ramblers, they struck a compromise with themselves. "We said, 'Okay, we're going to bring the Ramblers.' And then we said, 'We'll atone for it by doing Bill Monroe the next weekend,' which we did." Where they typically drew the line was in not producing concerts of themselves.[427]

In discussing the legacy of the Seattle Folklore Society, John and Irene focused on the ways it united people of different backgrounds and experiences. "The bluegrass example is that we did a tour with The Balfa Brothers and Marc Savoy and Bill Monroe," John told me. "And so, we put this [concert] on in Seattle, and the Darrington guys show up. I heard them, they were pissing and moaning, 'Who are these Bal-fah brothers, and why do we have to listen to them? Why can't we just have Monroe?' And at the intermission, they were the first people in line to buy Balfa Brothers records." Merging the two acts was John's idea, as he saw a similarity in spirit between the Balfa's carrying on with their tradition, and the Darrington community carrying on with theirs.[428]

Another memory involved Fred McFalls and Ben Bryson meeting Reverend Gary Davis at Phil and Vivian's apartment in the University District. "We had [Davis] at Reed, and we'd brought him up to do a show in Seattle," John explained. "And [McFalls and Bryson] showed up—Davis was [from] North Carolina, I think...so they just got along." Irene told me this was one of many occasions where they witnessed older white and black musicians meeting and trading songs from their younger days, with none of the racial tensions that were omnipresent in

[427] Ullman and Namkung, interview.
[428] Ibid.

American society at the time—"It was just amazing." "They clearly respected each other as musicians," John added, "And that made it clear to us that somehow music could transcend a lot of social ills."[429]

The Seattle Folklore Society continues with its mission today, a testament to the work of John, Irene, Phil, Vivian, and all the other charter members who got it started in 1966. The organization has long since been handed over to new generations of management, and now has over 1,000 members. They continue to serve as a pillar of Seattle's folk music community, producing concerts, dances, jam sessions, and music camps throughout the Seattle area.

Voyager Recordings and Publications

For over fifty years, Voyager Recordings and Publications has provided a home for a wide variety of traditional music, with a special emphasis on the lesser-known fiddle styles of the Pacific Northwest. Founded in 1967 by Phil and Vivian Williams, Voyager has long maintained a small footprint, operating out of the Williams' home in Seattle, but has played a critical role in documenting, preserving, and promoting folk music in the Northwest and beyond.[430] As discussed in the introduction, my own entry-point to this project owes to their second ever release, *Comin' Round the Mountain: Old Time Southern Singing and Playing in Western Washington*, which presented live concert and field recordings from Washington's Tar Heel bluegrass community.

As they became involved with the Tar Heel community in Darrington, Phil and Vivian soon began recording jam sessions, live concerts, and the fiddle and band contests held at

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[429] Ibid.
[430] Phil Williams. "Traditional Fiddle and Acoustic Music From the Pacific Northwest & Beyond." Voyager Recordings & Publications, accessed March 15, 2021, https://www.voyagerrecords.com/.

Darrington's annual Timber Bowl. The first records they had a hand in producing featured Fred McFalls and the Carolina Mountain Boys, sourced from live performances at the Timber Bowl, which were custom-pressed as 45rpm records on Seattle's Audio Recording label. Soon after, they were approached by a local club owner who wanted to record a rhythm and blues band he had booked, thus initiating their Crossroad record label. Releases on the Crossroad label would include a 45rpm of Vivian's performances of "Lee Highway Ramble" and "Back Up and Push" from the Timber Bowl fiddle contest, as well as a square dance record, featuring their band the Turkey Pluckers, which was produced by local dance caller Kappie Kappenman. The former was recorded in a makeshift tracking room, which they set up in a vacant apartment, marking their first true studio recording. Through a connection with a regional jukebox operator, Crossroad would also supply country and western records—recorded in Phil and Vivian's living room—to jukeboxes around the Northwest, which allowed the Williamses to continue upgrading their recording equipment over time.[431]

The event that ultimately led to the creation of Voyager Recordings, and marked a major shift in Phil and Vivian's musical focus, occurred in 1964, when they attended the National Fiddle Contest in Missoula, Montana for the first time. Vivian clarified that "national" in this context meant that it was open to anyone in the country, rather than crowning a "national" winner. This was Phil and Vivian's first introduction to the contest fiddle scene, which Vivian describes as "the revolution." Phil's brother, Bob, was attending law school at the University of Montana at the time, and as he did not own a car, wrote to see if Phil and Vivian would drive him home at the end of the school year, while attending the fiddle contest during their stay in

[431] Phil Williams. "History Of Voyager Recordings & Publications." Voyager Recordings & Publications, accessed March 15, 2021, https://voyagerrecords.com/arDevilsBox.htm.

Missoula. The opportunity to meet other fiddlers and compete in the contest sounded like a fun time, so off they went.[432]

Vivian told me the whole experience "was just a total mind-blowing thing." The contest was held in a performance hall on the university campus "with perfect acoustics"—no sound reinforcement necessary. Among the luminary fiddlers they encountered was Jim "Texas Shorty" Chancellor. "He and his dad and his older brother were warming up in the hospitality center, and they were playing this Texas stuff, and I had never heard anything like that in my life. It was just totally outrageous." Meanwhile, it turned out that Bob, a guitar player, had been playing with a legend of Northwest fiddling during his time in Missoula. "This guy that Phil's brother had been backing up in the local bar was...Jimmy Widner, who is one of the best fiddlers ever, who actually played bluegrass among other [styles]—I mean he could play any damn thing. He was just one of those guys."[433]

At one point, while they were standing around "looking cool" in their matching western outfits, with instruments in hand, including Phil with his banjo—not typical accompaniment on the contest fiddling circuit—another young fiddler approached the Williamses. "Byron Berline, who—we didn't know who he was, never met him—he came up to us and said, 'Hey, you guys play bluegrass?' Because we kind of looked like we might be a bluegrass band, you know." Berline asked Phil and his brother to back him up in the contest, and they all went to Berline's hotel room for a quick run-through of the tunes. "That was very interesting, because [Berline] had just put out that record with the Dillards. He had just met them and hit it off with them, and they didn't have a clue about his style of fiddling, and he didn't have a clue about bluegrass, and

[432] Williams, interview.
[433] Ibid.

they just loved each other and put out that *Pickin' & Fiddlin'* record, which was a wonderful record."[434]

"The first field recording that we did of fiddling was at a jam session in the Palace Hotel bar, connected with that contest," Vivian told me. Texas Shorty and Byron Berline were among the fiddlers they were able to record during these informal late-night sessions. "That Montana contest was just this amazing eye-opener." While still in Missoula, they learned about the more substantial National Old Time Fiddle Contest, located in Weiser, Idaho. To be held the following week, Phil and Vivian were not able to adjust their plans to attend Weiser in 1964 but would make their first trip the following year. "That was just a whole new fiddling world and musical world that we had had no idea [existed]. And that's where we started realizing that there were shitloads of old-time fiddlers around here, but they just weren't connected with the bluegrass scene or the folk scene in any way. They were just totally off in a different world." Phil and Vivian would regularly attend Weiser from that point forward, with fiddle, guitar—and recorder—in tow.[435]

As they began to accumulate many hours of field recordings, featuring some of the finest fiddlers in the country, it became clear they had something special on their hands. "We were aware of the recordings from Galax and...Union Grove, and we figured that this stuff that we were hearing [at Weiser] was just as good. And so, we figured, 'Hey, we can put out a recording that's just as good as anything.' And that's what inspired us to put out our first record (*Fiddle Jam Session*, VRLP 301)." Featuring the fiddling of Byron Berline, Texas Shorty, Jim Widner, and many others, *Fiddle Jam Session* presented the highlights of their informal jam session recordings made at the contests in Missoula and Weiser between 1964 and 1967. A second

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[434] Ibid.
[435] Ibid.

volume, *More Fiddle Jam Sessions* (VRLP 304), which was compiled from a broader selection of Northwest festivals, followed in 1972.[436]

Seeking to put out records according to their own vision, Phil and Vivian established Voyager Recordings, rather than continue with the Crossroad label. Their initial concern in documenting Northwest fiddle music wasn't that it was underrepresented—which it was—but rather, that it was simply "cool."[437] However, a perceived East Coast or Southern bias within the old-time music world was certainly not lost on them, according to Vivian:

> As time went on, we realized that not only is there a whole bunch of cool Southern kind of stuff happening here, but there is also a mixture of stuff from the Midwest and from Canada, and some homegrown stuff, which is completely ignored. And so that when people say, 'Old Time,' they mean, you know, 'If it ain't from West Virginia, it ain't Old Time.' So, then we started getting all pissed off with that…Because we figured, okay here we are, right in the middle of all this stuff, and we have the capacity to do this record [label] thing, and so we did. So, one of the things was, 'Okay, now nobody has any excuse to not know about it.' And yet, people would…hear all that stuff and it wouldn't register. And so, you know, we would get very pissed. [laughs][438]

Barry Brower, a close friend and musical collaborator of Phil and Vivian's, acknowledged the sometimes-territorial attitudes about traditional music in the Northwest. "Phil was a Northwest guy, and very defensive about music that...he felt had originated around here...primarily fiddle, [and] to some extent bluegrass, [that] was not being recognized back east. He had a real thing about the East coast bias, Southern bias. He got carried away with it a little, I would say, but it was his perception." Phil's position was certainly not without merit, and might likely be echoed by regional musicians in many outposts that find themselves beyond the reach of mainstream folklorists. "He had a point, and that point was that there is a lot of tradition out here too," Brower continued. "Particularly with the fiddle music; it goes way back. Settlers

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[436] Ibid.
[437] Ibid.
[438] Ibid.

coming out on the Oregon Trail and people developing their own styles out here. And he didn't feel that that was being recognized."[439]

Even Phil and Vivian, having developed close relationships in the Tar Heel bluegrass community early on, were enamored by the more closely Southern-originated music at first. Vivian provided some insight on how their thought process evolved, especially as it related to deciding who they might record:

> It was just whatever we liked, you know. If it appealed to us, we recorded it. Initially, we were just as sucked into the Southern thing as anybody else. The more Southern somebody sounded, the better we liked it. But then we started realizing that...when you go to Weiser, there's just so many different things going on. And so, you start out by chasing the stars, you know. I mean, if it's not the Southern-sounding guys like Jimmy Widner, who was—although he was from Idaho, he sounded very bluegrassy. And then the Texas guys—Benny Thomasson and all that stuff. And then, we were ignoring some of the ones that were just a little more laid back, a little more typical local dance fiddlers...it was just whatever we were impressed with. We were very impressed with Joe Pancerzewski, and he represented a whole—that was the first Canadian kind of…style that we ran into, and he was so damn good at it, and such a charismatic character that, you know, how could we resist? We ended up putting out three recordings of him.[440]

As Vivian points out, their own biases—not to mention the limitations of time and budget—led them to focus on certain fiddlers that piqued their interest at the expense of others. But as they became more entrenched in the fiddle community, which included founding the Washington Old Time Fiddlers Association, they gradually became aware of the unique diversity of fiddle styles, and other forms of music, that were well-represented in the Pacific Northwest. The resulting Voyager catalog features a plethora of fiddle styles, reflecting influences from all over the United States and Canada, but also includes such wide-ranging genres as Russian balalaika music, African marimba music, and Jewish storytelling. Furthermore, they welcomed contributions from outside sources, putting out records that might have difficulty gaining traction

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[439] Brower, interview.
[440] Williams, interview.

with more commercially-oriented labels. The musicians typically decided for themselves what material they would record, though sometimes Phil and Vivian would request their particular favorite pieces.[441]

Of special interest to me, as it related to this project, was how much, if at all, the Williamses were inspired by the efforts of prominent folklorists like Alan Lomax and Charles Seeger, or their more immediate contemporaries, Mike Seeger and John Cohen. Vivian confirmed the influence of their nationally-recognized peers, telling me, "Yeah, absolutely. We figured we were doing the same thing out here that they were doing back there. We modeled ourselves after that." Regarding how they ranked with some of the more prominent folk-oriented labels, like Folkways, Arhoolie, and County, she explained, "We knew we were much smaller, and we were doing mostly Northwest stuff. So, I think we—we considered ourselves peers as far as, you know, we were trying to keep the quality...the production at that [same] level...We were just sort of smaller frogs in a medium sized pond. The pond was small enough that we could be kind of semi-big [laughs]."[442]

The *Comin' Round the Mountain* LP that has meant so much to my musical development was their most explicit effort to emulate the work of larger folk labels. Thematically, it draws many parallels to a typical Folkways project, consisting of what were essentially field recordings of Southern musicians that had congregated in Washington State. "That LP...was modeled deliberately to look like a Folkways record...the [cover photo] that Irwin [Nash] took...the use of that light brown background...the whole thing. We just wanted it to look like a Folkways record." The liner notes would also reflect Folkways' influence, offering some historical context on

[441] Ibid.
[442] Ibid.

Southern migration to Washington and illuminating the songs and performers themselves. Vivian was responsible for producing most of Voyager's album art and liner notes.[443]

When I asked if there has been much acknowledgement from the academic community for Voyager's efforts to shine a light on traditional fiddle music in the Northwest, Vivian said, "There wasn't a whole lot, but what there was, was positive."[444] While Voyager may still fly under the radar of the scholarly crowd, their catalog speaks for itself, and will come to be appreciated fully in time. As a document of Northwest music history, and re-framing what we consider to be "old time fiddle music," Phil and Vivian's lifetime of work in this area will prove to be invaluable. Recognizing that Northwest fiddle music is still largely unknown outside the region, they have made nearly 300 field recordings from 100 fiddlers available for public access on the Voyager website. While their recordings and publications remain commercially available, the entire Voyager catalog, along with hundreds of reel-to-reel tapes, has been preserved for future study in the *Phil and Vivian Williams Collection* at the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia research center.

Northwest Folklife Festival

Perhaps Phil and Vivian Williams' most significant contribution to music and culture in the Pacific Northwest has been their involvement with the Northwest Folklife Festival. Celebrating fifty years in 2021, the festival has become the largest of its kind in North

[443] Ibid.
[444] Ibid.

America.[445] Since its inception, Folklife's mission has been to illuminate the full spectrum of cultural arts practiced in the Pacific Northwest.

The idea for a Seattle-based folk festival came from the National Park Service and National Folk Festival Association (NFFA), who sought to establish a national network of regional folk festivals, highlighting traditional music, dance, and folk arts around the country.[446] While attending a party in Washington, D.C., two members of the National Folk Festival Association met Mike Holmes, a former Seattle resident and member of the Seattle Folklore Society. Holmes suggested they contact Phil Williams with their idea for a festival in Seattle, after which the NFFA's Andy Wallace flew to Seattle, where he met with Phil, and together pitched the idea to Charles Gebler of the local National Parks Service office.[447]

The proposed festival would be held at Seattle Center, a 74-acre campus near downtown Seattle that was originally built to be the site for the 1962 World's Fair. With Memorial Day weekend of 1972 as its target, and a very small ($6,000) operating budget, the festival was announced to members of the Seattle Folklore Society in their December 1971 journal, stating a need for volunteers and additional funding. According to an article on the festival's history by Jim Kershner, "A coalition of local groups, including the Seattle Folklore Society, Seattle Center, the Scandia Folk Dance Society, alternative radio station KRAB-FM, the Washington Old-Time Fiddlers, and REACH (Recreation, Entertainment and Creative Help, a nonprofit group that provided entertainment to retirement homes), threw themselves into fundraising and organizing. Much of the organization was done in a mad rush in the weeks before the Memorial

[445] "Our Story," 50 Years of Northwest Folklife, accessed May 4, 2021, https://www.nwfolklife.org/about/our-story.html.
[446] Stewart Hendrickson. "The First NW Folklife Festival – 1972: A Modest Beginning." Pacific Northwest Folklore Society: The NW Hoot, accessed March 18, 2021, http://pnwfolklore.org/wp-nwhoot/index.php/2017/05/16/the-first-nw-folklife-festival-1972-a-modest-beginning-by-stewart-hendrickson/.
[447] Williams, interview.

Day weekend target date."[448] Requiring a near-miraculous effort to bring to fruition, the festival was finally announced to the public in a May 14, 1972 article in the *Seattle Times*, less than two weeks before opening, as scheduled, on May 26.[449]

Met with great enthusiasm, the first year saw over 300 performers with an audience of approximately 123,000. Walking the grounds that weekend, Phil Williams was asked by a representative from the NFFA how they had managed to audition that many performers. Recalling his response years later, Phil said, "'We didn't audition a single one...The theory was, if you give a person an opportunity, they'll do a good job, and that's what it's all about. They always do, and that's the way it is today. We tried to stay away from the idea that we had these 'stars'...No one was featured.'"[450] The festival was an immediate success, with the attendance nearly doubling the following year, reaching 225,000. Now celebrating its fiftieth year, the festival currently brings a crowd of about 250,000, with 6,000 performers, and 800 volunteer workers.[451]

Of course, the Northwest Folklife Festival did not occur in a vacuum. The 1960s saw folk festivals growing in stature in the nation's consciousness, with the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island providing a launching pad for artists such as Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. George Wein and Albert Grossman organized the festival in Newport, initially as a commercial event, held in 1959 and 1960. Despite presenting many of the apparent "stars" of the folk revival, the festivals were financially unsuccessful. Jackson explains that, "The two promoters had missed the point: stars weren't enough to attract big audiences in this phase of the revival. Audiences

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[448] Jim Kershner, "Northwest Folklife Festival (Seattle)," HistoryLink.org, last modified November, 17, 2017, https://www.historylink.org/file/20470.
[449] Ibid.
[450] Jennifer White, "What People Do: The Beginnings of the Northwest Folklife Festival," Seattle Folklore Society, accessed May 2, 2021, http://www.seafolklore.org/wp/what-people-do-the-beginnings-of-the-northwest-folklife-festival/.
[451] "Our Story," 50 Years of Northwest Folklife.

were beginning to demand significant participation by traditional performers." Learning from their predecessors' mistakes, the inaugural University of Chicago Folk Festival was held the following year, with traditional artists like Elizabeth Cotton and Roscoe Holcomb performing in place of revival celebrities, like the Kingston Trio.[452]

Under the guidance of Pete Seeger, Newport was reorganized in 1963 as a nonprofit foundation, which "would be a forum for folk music programmed and directed entirely by performers…a festival which was not grounded in profit."[453] Phil Williams would later echo this revised approach, in developing the mission of the Northwest Folklife Festival. Jackson describes the second iteration of Newport as the "most influential of the revival folk festivals," continually placing a greater emphasis on traditional performers, and expanding the number of workshops that allowed greater audience participation and exchange of ideas.[454] Four years later, in 1967, the Smithsonian organized the first Festival of American Folklife on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., with Ralph Rinzler, who had previously been involved with the Newport festival, serving as its first director.[455] Established as a free event that appealed a broad audience, the Smithsonian festival was unique, in that it "never had to turn a profit and it never had to find grants; it just had to continue to make political sense to the bureaucrats in the Smithsonian and the congressmen on Capitol Hill," thereby allowing it to fulfill its mission of representing the traditional arts without concern for the bottom line.[456] Again, similarities can be drawn to the Northwest Folklife Festival, which is partially supported by public funding from the city. However, the Seattle festival has never been immune from budget concerns, even losing support

[452] Bruce Jackson, "The Folksong Revival," in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 75.
[453] Ibid. 76-77.
[454] Ibid. 77.
[455] Ibid. 78.
[456] Ibid. 79.

from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) after the festival board decided the NEA's definitions for the types of performers they could present were too strict.[457]

Both the Newport and Smithsonian festivals can trace their roots to the National Folk Festival, which served as the model for future events of its kind, employing field workers, pioneering demonstration workshops, incorporating craft presentations, and above all, seeking to provide an equal platform for cultural expression, regardless of race or nationality. For much of the country, this would be the first exposure to many traditional music forms, from blues and Cajun, to polka and Tex-Mex conjunto. Kentuckian Sarah Gertrude Knott organized the first National Folk Festival in St. Louis in 1934, having established the National Folk Festival Association (later renamed National Council for the Traditional Arts) a year prior. Reflecting on the festival's legacy in later years, Knott said, "We knew this new work was changing the way the nation saw itself, that some of the smaller pieces of the national puzzle were being viewed with appreciation for the first time." Continuing in this spirit, the National Folk Festival was held in various cities around the country, before embarking on an eleven-year residency at Wolf Trap Farm Park in 1971, which was established in suburban Washington, D.C. as the first national park devoted to the performing arts.[458][459]

In discussing Ralph Rinzler's involvement with the Festival of American Folklife, Neil Rosenberg highlights the term "folklife" as being "newly fashionable in American folklore scholarship" in the late 1960s. "While 'folklore' described specific oral traditions—songs, stories, beliefs, and so forth—folklife encompassed the entire spectrum of traditional culture,

[457] Barry Brower, "The Northwest Folklife Festival: Growing Pains at Fifteen," Barry Brower's Website: Articles, accessed May 4, 2021, https://barrybrower.org/articles.html.
[458] Andrew Wallace, "The National Folk Festival: The Sarah Gertrude Knott Years," Folklife Center news 24, no. 1 (2002).
[459] "A Brief History of the National Folk Festival," National Council for the Traditional Arts, accessed May 4, 2021, https://ncta-usa.org/the-national-folk-festival/a-brief-history-of-the-national-folk-festival/.

including not just oral traditions but artifacts, ceremonies, and patterns of daily life." With the Newport Folk Festival focused exclusively on music, Rosenberg differentiates the Smithsonian festivals for having featured a broader array of traditions, drawn from a multitude of cultural groups, and consequently promoting the growth of similar festivals around the country.[460] The Northwest Folklife Festival was born with this concept of folklife in mind.

In addition to his organizational efforts, Phil Williams provided the vocal leadership that would ultimately set the Northwest Folklife Festival apart from its forerunners. Quoted in a 1986 *Seattle Weekly* article by Barry Brower, when the festival was grappling with its size and funding, Phil underscored the founding purpose of Folklife: "We designed Folklife to be a forum where people were presented things they could actually learn to do themselves."[461] Further articulating this vision, he continues, "The Seattle festival is not run as a museum of participants such as the one presented by the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. Folklife is a contemporary exposition that showcases things that people are doing out there right now. Things that acquaint people with traditional arts of the area and allow them to get involved in the activity. I believe that the existence of this festival is responsible for the increase in performers that we're now trying to accommodate."[462] Moreover, Phil was adamantly opposed to charging an admission fee as a way of relieving the financial burden, which Barry learned firsthand after suggesting it himself. "I understand now—that was the cardinal rule of Folklife; freely given music. And I have the highest respect for that. I'd never suggest that again, after I realized just how important that really was to the whole concept."[463]

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[460] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 274.
[461] Brower, "The Northwest Folklife Festival: Growing Pains at Fifteen."
[462] Ibid.
[463] Brower, interview.

While bluegrass was never the sole focus of Folklife, it maintained a strong presence in the early years, providing a critical meeting point for bluegrass musicians in the Pacific Northwest. With different genres spread across various stages, bluegrass and string band music was initially presented at Flag Pavilion, which was the largest outdoor stage. The adjoining hillside, which became known as "Bluegrass Hill," was quickly taken over by bluegrass enthusiasts from all over the Northwest, who would jam together and socialize throughout the entire weekend.[464] Of the folks I interviewed for this project who were active in the 1970s and 1980s Washington bluegrass scene, everyone emphasized the significance of Folklife—and specifically, Bluegrass Hill—as a melting pot for bluegrass musicians in the region.

Harley Bray, who moved to the area in the early 1980s, described his first visit to Folklife as a revelation, with fiddles and banjos all around. A highly respected banjo player and member of the Bray Brothers, Harley credits Bluegrass Hill as his introduction to the Northwest bluegrass community.[465] Barry Brower also spoke to the informal networking that would take place, allowing pickers to gauge who they were musically compatible with. When a gigging opportunity came around, one might call on a player they met at Bluegrass Hill to help fill out a band.[466] As Vivian Williams recalls, the festival was reorganized under new leadership in later years, which marked the end of a consolidated bluegrass stage, and with it, Bluegrass Hill. "When the bluegrass performances got scattered into other venues, that whole Bluegrass Hill thing just fell apart, just died. And that was really a very nifty institution."[467]

In addition to the social and musical impact of Bluegrass Hill, the Northwest Folklife Festival is notable for another significant contribution to bluegrass-adjacent music in the Pacific

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[464] Ibid.
[465] Bray, interview.
[466] Brower, interview.
[467] Williams, interview.

Northwest: revitalizing the career of legendary Texas fiddler, Benny Thomasson, who had retired from his auto repair business and moved to Washington to be with his son, Dale. He was well-known to fiddlers around the country, having been featured on two County Records LPs: *Texas Hoedown* (County 703) and *Country Fiddling from the Big State* (County 724).

Hearing rumors that Thomasson was in the area, John Burke, Folklife's first director, acquired a small grant from the festival budget to find Thomasson and invite him to the inaugural Folklife Festival. "He found Benny, and brought him to the first festival," Vivian Williams told me. "And so, Benny shows up at the festival, and—he figured that his fiddling days were through, he didn't know of any kind of a scene up here—and he comes to the festival, and there's a whole raft of the [Washington Old Time Fiddlers Association] people, and they're all in a room together, because at the time, the festival was divided up. Each stage was a different genre of music. And so, here were a whole shitload of fiddlers that knew who he was, so he just got sucked right into the fiddle contest scene right away."[468]

Benny made his first visit to the National Old Time Fiddlers' Contest in Weiser, Idaho, the following month, where he placed third in competition. After placing third once again in 1973, he swept the competition in 1974, further cementing his legacy as one of the great contest-style fiddlers in the country.[469] Having sparked a career revival of sorts, Thomasson became a mentor to fiddlers in the Northwest, sharing not only his music, but a life's worth of accumulated wisdom. Vivian shared her experience in an interview she gave for the *Living Legacies Podcast*: "He was a mentor to me, not for tunes—I don't think I ever learned a tune from him—but just spiritually, because I learned a lot of just good attitude. Like I had started getting sort of

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[468] Ibid.
[469] Michael Mendelson, "Benny Thomasson and the Texas Fiddling Tradition," JEMF Quarterly Vol. 10, Part 3, #35 (Autumn 1974).

competitive, you know, and that's not a comfortable place to be. And he just taught me that you don't have to be that way. You just do your thing and relax, and share your music. It was pretty much the same attitude as the people in Darrington."[470]

Reflecting on her and Phil's legacy, Vivian told me, "If nothing else had happened, if we'd never done anything else in our lives but put [Folklife] together—and that was really Phil's thing—that's amazing. It's totally amazing." Her sister, who has been involved with local political activism, apparently agrees, suggesting that Folklife has done more to bring progress to Seattle than her own political efforts.[471] Barry Brower shares a similar sentiment, suggesting that Phil's original vision for Folklife, as a way for people to share traditional arts in a non-commercial setting, has likely impacted millions of people—a safe bet, considering annual attendance regularly hovers around 250,000.[472] Though the impact of Folklife reaches far beyond any single music community, its importance to the development of bluegrass in the Northwest is particularly relevant to the scope of this project.

[470] Vivian Williams, interview with Kelli Faryar, *Living Legacies Podcast*, podcast audio, February 2, 2021, https://www.nwfolklife.org/programs/cultural-focus/living-legacies-podcast.html.
[471] Williams, interview.
[472] Brower, interview.

CHAPTER 11. REFLECTING ON TAR HEEL BLUEGRASS IN THE NORTHWEST

This project began as a means of reflecting on my own involvement with bluegrass music, dating back to my own "conversion experience," seventeen years ago, at the Darrington Bluegrass Festival. Having no other frame of reference at the time, I didn't realize how fortunate I was to be involved with the Seattle community, which featured an active and supportive jamming community, retail establishments offering supplies, instructional materials, instruments, and recordings, as well as a strong network of venues and regional festivals, which included two additional favorites: the Wintergrass Festival (then in Tacoma, Washington) and the Wenatchee River Bluegrass Festival (Cashmere, Washington).

While I quickly gained an awareness of the North Carolina connection to Darrington, I couldn't begin to understand its depth until I dug into this research. Examining the Darrington Tar Heel community, and its significance to bluegrass in the Northwest, has led to a much greater awareness of Washington's rich legacy of country music. Yet, as tempting as it may be to attribute the regional bluegrass scene to Darrington, the contributions of Phil and Vivian Williams, and their peers, call for a more nuanced understanding of how this community—and music communities in general—develop. They can rarely be credited to a single individual, group, culture, or location. In this spirit, the Darrington Bluegrass Festival perfectly encapsulates the overarching theme herein, requiring the combined efforts of the Darrington Tar Heels and the Seattle revivalists, both in its founding and continued viability.

Darrington Bluegrass Festival

Just a few miles west of town, situated next to the Darrington Rodeo Grounds, the Darrington Bluegrass Music Park is host to one of the longest-running bluegrass festivals in the Pacific Northwest. A large sign near the main entrance declares Darrington the "Bluegrass Capitol [sic] of the N.W." Held continuously since 1977 (until the COVID-19 pandemic), the Darrington Bluegrass Festival has established itself as a beacon of bluegrass music in the region and carries on the legacy of musicians who moved west from North Carolina, looking for work in the vast forests of Washington's North Cascades. Festival brochures, and the local news articles that promote the event every July, tell an abbreviated version of the story:

"At first it was just people pickin' in their own homes," Bertha is quoted as saying. The names that follow—Fred McFalls, O.C. Helton, Grover and Ernestine Jones, Roy Morgan, Sam and Bertha Nations, Earl Jones, Harley Worthington, and Hank English—represent a partial list of local participants, all with ties to Appalachia, who helped grow a series of informal jam sessions into a festival that has spanned nearly half a century, drawing attendance from all over the Northwest and beyond. The festival remains the most visible and enduring testament to the Tar Heel community's contribution to bluegrass in the Pacific Northwest.

Vivian Williams rightly credits the Darrington Bluegrass Festival, an event first held in 1977, with helping to establish the continuity of Darrington's bluegrass scene.[473] As the longest running bluegrass festival in the Pacific Northwest, this sentiment could be expanded to its role in the bluegrass community on a regional scale. A part of a growing national and international network of bluegrass festivals, events such as the one established in Darrington played a significant role in bringing bluegrass to a global audience and providing a more stable economic

[473] Williams, interview.

base for traveling bluegrass acts. Many contemporary bands derive the vast majority of their performance income from the festival circuit, rather than the more traditional network of nightclubs and theaters utilized in other genres.[474]

The rise of bluegrass festivals in the late 1960s coincided with unprecedented mobility for many Americans, due in part to favorable economic conditions and an ever-expanding interstate highway system, which made domestic travel more accessible than ever before. Beginning with Carlton Haney's pioneering bluegrass festival, held in 1965 in Fincastle, Virginia, the festival landscape evolved and surged in popularity from the late 1960s through the early 1970s. Emerging publications like *Bluegrass Unlimited* and *Muleskinner News* helped spread the word by publicizing upcoming events, ultimately printing annual editions dedicated solely to the summer festival season. For bluegrass fans, the opportunity to see such a high concentration of their favorite performers over the course of a long weekend, and at a reasonable cost, was a dream come true. Furthermore, the popularity of parking lot jam sessions became a hallmark of bluegrass festivals, providing opportunities for musicians to interact with like-minded individuals from varying cultural and geographical backgrounds.[475]

Early attempts at bluegrass festivals in western Washington were met with mixed success. An event called the "First Annual Bluegrass Country Music Festival" was held August 3, 1968, according to a ticket stub Harley Worthington showed me during our visit. While there was no location printed on the ticket, Harley believes this may have been an artifact from a show he organized in Everett, which included familiar regional mainstays in Fred McFalls, the Turkey Pluckers, and Harley's duo project with Earl Jones.[476] In all likelihood, this was the first

[474] Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 362-368.
[475] Ibid. 272-286.
[476] Worthington, interview.

approximation of a bluegrass festival in the area. Two years later, the first Tenino Old Time Music Festival was held in Tenino, a small town in southwest Washington. Organized by fiddler Neil Johnston and the Tenino Lions Club, the festival featured regional bands, including Tall Timber, Bremerton's Rural Delivery, and the Round Town Girls, from the nearby Evergreen State College in Olympia.[477]

In August of 1973, an ambitious three-day festival was held in Woodinville's Gold Creek Park. Presented by Cascade Mountain Music Festivals, Inc., this "First Annual Bluegrass & Old-Time Music Festival" more closely resembled the weekend-long events being established around the country at this time and was likely the first of its kind in Washington State. Beginning on Friday, August 24 with a Bluegrass Talent Contest, the weekend proceeded with workshops, jam sessions, and the main concerts, including a Sunday morning Gospel show. Featured performers included notable regional acts like Oregon's Sawtooth Mountain Boys and Washington's Southfork Bluegrass Band, along with national acts Norman Blake, Vassar Clements, Tut Taylor, Buck White, and Butch Robins.[478] Despite a heavy promotional effort, including a full-page advertisement placed in *Bluegrass Unlimited*, the festival was ultimately a failure. Having appeared on the bill with Earl Jones, Harley told me, "We all lost out on it—we didn't get paid or anything."[479]

Depending on the source, the idea for a bluegrass festival in Darrington can be attributed to several of the individuals discussed in these pages. Phil Williams, Irwin Nash, Earl Jones, and Harley Worthington have each been mentioned in various publications and interviews, and will all be credited here, alongside those who ultimately manifested the idea. Above all, it was a

[477] Williams, "Early Bluegrass in Western Washington and the Pacific Northwest: A personal account by Phil Williams."
[478] Ibid.
[479] Worthington, interview.

collaborative effort, which likely would not have come to fruition without the contributions of all involved. Quoted in an article Barry Brower wrote about Darrington and the festival, appearing in the March 1986 issue of Bluegrass Unlimited, Darrington resident and Tar Heel musician Grover Jones shared his memory of how it began. "'It was Phil Williams...who first suggested a festival,' recalls Grover. 'O.C. [Helton], Roy Morgan, and myself got enthused, chipped in five dollars each, and headed down the road selling ads.'"[480]

In his essay, "Early Bluegrass in Western Washington and the Pacific Northwest," Phil Williams cites Harley Worthington with identifying the need for a bluegrass festival in the greater Puget Sound region. "[Harley] called a meeting at his house to discuss this concept, inviting Grover and Ernestine Jones, Sam and Bertha Nations, Roy Morgan, Hank English...and Phil and Vivian Williams. It was there [they] decided to put together an organization to launch a bluegrass festival in Darrington."[481] According to Vivian, Phil's primary role was in handling the legal paperwork. From that point forward, the Darrington community took charge, forming the Darrington Bluegrass and Country Music Makers Association, the non-profit organization that continues to operate the festival to this day. O.C. Helton, who along with his wife, Wilma, was a founding board member, arranged for the festival to be held initially on the Darrington rodeo grounds, before later moving to an adjacent piece of land in the 1980s, where an outdoor amphitheater was constructed, giving the festival its permanent home.[482]

In her research, Laney finds that women "have been critical to [bluegrass] festivals, but have been largely written out of the genre's history or have encountered barriers to gaining

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[480] Barry Brower, "Darrington: Bluegrass Capital of the Northwest," Barry Brower's Website: Articles, accessed May 5, 2021, https://barrybrower.org/articles.html.
[481] Williams, "Early Bluegrass in Western Washington and the Pacific Northwest: A personal account by Phil Williams."
[482] Williams, interview.

recognition."[483] The Darrington festival provides an opportunity to rewrite women into the history of bluegrass, given the many women who have been essential to the festival from the outset. Several women have served as board members, including—but not limited to—Bertha (Nations) Whiteside, Wilma Helton, Ernestine Jones, and Johanna Jones. The 2017 festival brochure additionally cites Diane Reece (Vice President), Dianne Green (Secretary), Shellie Jones (Treasurer), Diana Morgan (Promotions), and Bobbie Carlile (Public Relations Officer). Sharon Bennett, who was a co-founder of the Washington Bluegrass Association, handled emcee duties at Darrington for many years, and was a memorable part of my first years attending the festival. Laney draws special attention to "the impact of concessions stands and the economic impacts of women within the festival space, but beyond the stage."[484] Here again, I recall my own experiences at Darrington, where the merchandise booth was frequently operated by women, including Ernestine Jones, whom I met there in 2017.

Though not without its challenges over the years, the Darrington Bluegrass Festival remains a highlight of the summer festival season for Northwest bluegrassers, and the annual festival brochure continues to inform newcomers of the rich Tar Heel legacy that serves as the festival's foundation. While many of the organizations covered in this project played a role in elevating Washington's bluegrass scene, Vivian cites the Darrington Bluegrass Festival as the culminating effort that helped establish its permanence, bringing bluegrass to a larger regional audience.[485]

[483] Laney, "Recreating and Deconstructing the Shifting Politics of (Bluegrass) Festivals," 197.
[484] Ibid. 163.
[485] Williams, interview.

Phil and Vivian's Later Years

Around 2001, John Ullman and Irene Namkung came up with the idea to do a historical music program about the Oregon Trail. Phil and Vivian put it together, becoming musical lecturers through the Washington Commission for the Humanities. Funded through grants, their fifty-minute presentations were followed by informative question and answer sessions, and offered free to the public in regional libraries. Additionally, the Williamses gave abbreviated presentations through the Folklife in the Schools program, supported by Northwest Folklife.[486]

A few years after they began doing the Oregon Trail presentations, Vivian received a letter from a fiddler friend in Riggins, Idaho, who had found a music manuscript from an historic Idaho mining camp. She had learned and taught some of the tunes, but offered the manuscript to Vivian, who explained that "it was just mind-blowing—total mind-blowing." The manuscript was compiled by a German-speaking flute player, who was a gold miner in Warrens, Idaho, circa the 1860s, and had an ensemble consisting of two violins, banjo, flute, and accordion, which would play dances on Saturday nights at the local dancehall. "They converted the bar into a dance hall, so…the half a dozen respectable ladies within twenty miles could go into the bar, because they shut down liquor sales. And the important thing is they turned the pictures to the wall…so that the ladies wouldn't be offended."[487]

The author of the manuscript traveled the area collecting tunes, not unlike the early ballad collectors of the American South, except that he was specifically dealing with instrumental dance music. "He went around to different people and had them whistle or sing or hum or play or write down their favorite dance tunes. And then—he wrote them down mostly, because most of it is in

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[486] Ibid.
[487] Ibid.

his handwriting. And that's what the band played from. And it was just this cool stuff. So, there was a few New England fiddle tunes, there was a bunch of minstrel tunes, there were some waltzes. Just whatever you'd expect…all of the dance stuff from that era." Vivian told me she "just got sucked into that whole [manuscript] thing as a research project." After discovering another manuscript of historic Northwest dance music, she explained that this has been her major project in the twenty-first century. "The Oregon Trail thing was the beginning, and then the manuscript thing was like—phew!"[488]

When the manuscripts came into the picture, it challenged their efforts to adhere to fiddle-style playing, rather than classical violin-style. "We tried to…stay on the fiddle side of things, but these damn manuscripts made that impossible…Because this is old fashioned dance music, and some of it is harder than hell, and requires a whole lot of technique. And there's, you know, mazourkas, and some really fancy waltzes, and other stuff…I mean, people danced to that back then…And then we also became aware of various people who had a foot in each camp (classical and folk), and that this was actually pretty common…historically…modern people and then people historically."[489]

Albeit not as active in the bluegrass community by the 1980s, Phil and Vivian co-founded a band called Friends of Sally Johnson, which featured an all-star cast of Northwest musicians. "Barry [Brower] put that together, because Barry figured that Phil and I, and Harley and Shera [Bray], ought to be playing together. And so, he just, you know, made it happen."[490] Barry met Harley Bray through Stu Herrick, who owned the Folkstore in Seattle. Shortly after moving to nearby Edmonds, Washington in the early 1980s, Harley went to the Folkstore in

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[488] Ibid.
[489] Ibid.
[490] Ibid.

search of banjo strings, striking up a conversation when he saw that Stu had a copy of Pat Burton's *We've Been Waiting for This, Pat Burton*, which Harley had played banjo on. When Stu—a mandolin player—discovered who Harley was, he exclaimed, "You're Nate Bray's brother?!" Stu had been a big fan of Harley's late brother, having learned a lot from their recordings with the Bray Brothers. Stu introduced Harley to Barry, who brought Phil and Vivian to Harley's fiftieth birthday party in 1984, and they started Friends of Sally Johnson the following year.[491] The band did not tour, but played regional festivals, including Darrington, and had no problem with bookings, given Phil and Vivian's stature in the community. According to Barry, they were a traditional bluegrass band at their core, but played an array of material, reflecting their eclectic personalities. While each member brought something valuable to the band, Barry says they played to their strengths—Vivian's fiddle and Harley's banjo—which led to a friendly competition between the two, sometimes pushing each other at high tempos while the rest of the band held on. Though talks of recording an album never materialized, Barry has uploaded several live performance videos from 1987 and 1988 on his YouTube channel.[492]

Barry spoke very highly of Phil and Vivian, telling me that he considered Phil one of his best friends. Emphasizing Phil's character, Barry said, "The good that he did for everybody is just astounding, and he did a lot for me—I mean, right until when he died, he was doing things for me…And that was not just me, it was everybody. Freely giving guy, you know, and he didn't want money for anything." As we discussed Phil and Vivian's legacy, Barry suggested their impact on the music community may be acknowledged by younger generations of bluegrass and folk musicians "to some degree, but not to the extent that it probably should be."[493] This

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[491] Bray, interview.
[492] Brower, interview; Friends of Sally Johnson videos can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/user/barrybrower/videos.
[493] Brower, interview.

resonates with my own experience in the Seattle bluegrass community, as I knew little about Phil and Vivian, beyond their association with Voyager Recordings, when I first began researching this project.

In addition to her many behind-the-scenes contributions to the Northwest music community, Vivian must also be recognized for her groundbreaking work as an accomplished instrumentalist. Once more, this highlights the critical work of women in building the foundation of Washington's bluegrass scene. Though gender roles, and specifically, the experiences of women in bluegrass, were not the primary focus of this project, it would be remiss to overlook these issues, especially given Vivian's critical involvement with the development of Northwest bluegrass. As a community and industry, there is still plenty of work to be done to ensure broader representation and inclusion in bluegrass music, but it has come a long way since the 1960s. At that time, it was still a heavily male-dominated field, with prominent women instrumentalists seemingly out of the ordinary, at least to public awareness. As Murphy Henry points out in her pioneering book, *Pretty Good for a Girl: Women in Bluegrass*, we have long been conditioned to overlook the presence of women in bluegrass. Henry offers a partial list of the women who were playing bluegrass professionally prior to 1965, of which Sally Ann Forrester, Wilma Lee Cooper, and Rose Maddox are just a few.[494]

When Phil and Vivian first became involved with Northwest bluegrass, she was the only woman participating and performing publicly, with the notable exception of Bertha Nations, and a few other women who were affiliated with gospel singing groups. "I was the freak," Vivian explained. "I was out of the kitchen—I'm in the living room with the men playing music. And it was okay, because I was with my husband, so I was not a threat to anybody else's husband

[494] Murphy Henry, *Pretty Good for a Girl: Women in Bluegrass* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 3.

[laughs].” She did not recall encountering any resistance when they began visiting Darrington, or in the Seattle bluegrass community as it became more established. “I never became aware of anything like that, not even weird vibes about it.”[495]

By the early 1970s, women were slowly becoming involved in greater numbers, at least on the west coast. In Seattle, Sue Thompson and Barbara Lamb were playing in prominent bands, and around the same time, Kathy Kallick, Laurie Lewis, and others, were beginning to establish themselves in California, eventually forming the Good Ol’ Persons in 1974—a band whose “’quiet revolution brought acceptance to the idea that women could do more in the bluegrass world than play bass.’”[496] While never feeling targeted herself, Vivian did witness some negativity toward another female musician—in one of her own bands, no less. When they hired a woman to play guitar and sing lead vocals, their bass player at the time quit, stating that he didn’t want to be bossed around by “that woman.” They were surprised to experience something like this within their own ranks but did not let it slow them down. “We figured, ‘Okay, we’re more interested in her than we are in him, so to hell with it.’”[497]

Barry Brower, who came out of the northern California bluegrass community, before resettling in the Pacific Northwest, suggested the scene on the west coast was more progressive than its eastern counterparts. “I would say that the female influence is a lot stronger out here than it may be back east,” he told me. “I don’t know, it’s probably changing back there now, but at least ten to fifteen, twenty years ago, there was not much female [involvement], [whereas] on the west coast there was a lot of female influence in the music, because I think the west coast has been more open to females playing in groups, and therefore, there are more of them—and good

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[495] Williams, interview.
[496] Henry, *Pretty Good for a Girl: Women in Bluegrass*, 265.
[497] Williams, interview.

ones."[498] Certainly, the pioneering roles of Vivian Williams, Laurie Lewis, and many other women, helped open the doors for more to follow. With musicians of that caliber, there was no denying that women could hold their own as lead instrumentalists, vocalists, and band leaders in the bluegrass world.

When I asked Vivian to reflect a bit on her and Phil's legacy, she focused on the large-scale impact of the Northwest Folklife Festival and acknowledged their pioneering role in bringing Northwest old time fiddling traditions to light. On bluegrass, specifically, she said, "I personally really wanted to…expose more people to this wonderful music, you know, bluegrass, because I had a ton of friends who didn't have a clue what—'Bluegrass? What's that?' And to find a venue for it to happen in—there really wasn't. I mean, there were a couple of shows…radio programs and stuff, but they just—it just wasn't the right thing." For her part, she doesn't seem too concerned about whether her and Phil's contributions are ultimately recognized by younger generations. "I don't know what we 'deserve' but, you know, I don't think people are that historically oriented. They're just into what's happening now…Only a few people sort of want to say, 'Oh, gee, how did this get started? Where did it come from? How did it get here?'"[499] Maybe for those few people, this project will provide some answers.

Conclusions

Where many graduate students agonize over their selection of a thesis topic, this one came naturally to me. The 2004 Darrington Bluegrass Festival marked the beginning of a lifelong relationship with bluegrass music, and I spent much of my late teens and early twenties

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[498] Brower, interview.
[499] Williams, interview.

navigating the Washington bluegrass scene, before pursuing an undergraduate degree in bluegrass, old-time, and country music studies here in East Tennessee. As I embarked on this project, my initial goal was to document the musical legacy of Appalachian migration to western Washington, hoping to bring attention to the rich, deeply rooted bluegrass community in the Pacific Northwest. During the early phases of research, I became aware of Phil and Vivian Williams' many important contributions to traditional music in the region and realized the significance of their roles in telling not only the story of Darrington's Tar Heel bluegrass community, but how it transitioned to the broader, regional community that I would come to know years later. From this understanding came the central argument of this work, that the existence of a sustainable bluegrass scene in western Washington owes to the confluence of two communities: the Appalachian migrants, who brought their music to Darrington, and the branch of Seattle's folk revival community that discovered an interest in bluegrass, with Phil and Vivian Williams as its chief architects.

Much of the value of this work is a credit to the interview participants who generously shared their time and experiences with me. Though many voices are not included here—and hopefully will be in future iterations of this project—I was fortunate to speak with a broad range of people, from first- and second-generation Appalachian migrants, to some of the critical role-players in Seattle's folk revival and early bluegrass communities. Their stories are supplemented by a review of published literature pertaining to Appalachian migration, bluegrass as it relates to the folk revival, and a survey of western Washington's country music landscape upon the arrival of Darrington's Tar Heel musicians. Additionally, archival newspaper research is used to provide detail, especially during the early years of the Darrington scene. Theoretical frameworks involving music revival and music community studies are introduced to contextualize the

emergence of Washington's bluegrass community within a broader cultural and historical landscape.

The early years of Darrington's Tar Heel bluegrass community are told through the lens of the McFalls, Nations, and Jones families. Through these families' stories, the Darrington scene takes shape, illuminating such important institutions as Darrington's Timber Bowl and Everett's Tar Heel picnics, while setting the stage for the eventual cross-pollination with Seattle's folk revival community. As the project shifts to the perspectives of Vivian Williams and her peers, the Seattle folk music scene of the 1950s and 1960s comes into view, and their enthusiasm for bluegrass ultimately pulls them to Darrington. The relationships formed here spark the rapid growth of Seattle's bluegrass scene through the 1960s and 1970s, illustrated by the various bands and organizations the Williamses were involved with, especially the Seattle Folklore Society, their Voyager Records label, and the Northwest Folklife Festival. The thesis comes full circle with the launch of the Darrington Bluegrass Festival in 1977, having been founded in collaboration between both the Darrington and Seattle communities.

By focusing on the collaborative nature of Washington's early bluegrass community, this project explores the relationship between bluegrass and the folk revival, while also contributing to studies of bluegrass communities occurring beyond the broadly accepted "cultural hearth" of the music in southern Appalachia. Additionally, by highlighting the critical work of women in developing Washington's bluegrass community, it begins to construct a more inclusive narrative of bluegrass history, in response to Laney's call. Within the field of Appalachian Studies, this work brings attention to a significant stream of rural-to-rural migration, underrepresented in Appalachian migration studies, while also acknowledging the significant cultural impacts Appalachian migrants have made in other parts of the country.

As many aspects of society seemingly grow more divisive and hostile, this thesis provides an important example of people from differing cultural backgrounds coming together to build a musical community that continues to flourish in the Pacific Northwest. In this light, I would encourage future scholars to seek out other examples of collaborative music communities, with hopes of demonstrating the power of music—and other artforms—in bringing people closer together.

Looking ahead, I hope to continue growing this project by including more voices from the Pacific Northwest bluegrass community, and by tracing its development through the 1970s and beyond. There is also much work to be done with Phil and Vivian's collection of audio recordings, housed at the State Historical Society of Missouri in Columbia, which provides an opportunity to analyze the repertoire and playing styles of many of the musicians discussed in this project. Having benefited greatly from the many musical interactions I've experienced at various jam sessions and festivals around the Northwest, I feel privileged to be able to bring scholarly attention to this significant bluegrass scene, and to recognize some of the important individuals that helped set it in motion.

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APPENDIX: Photographs

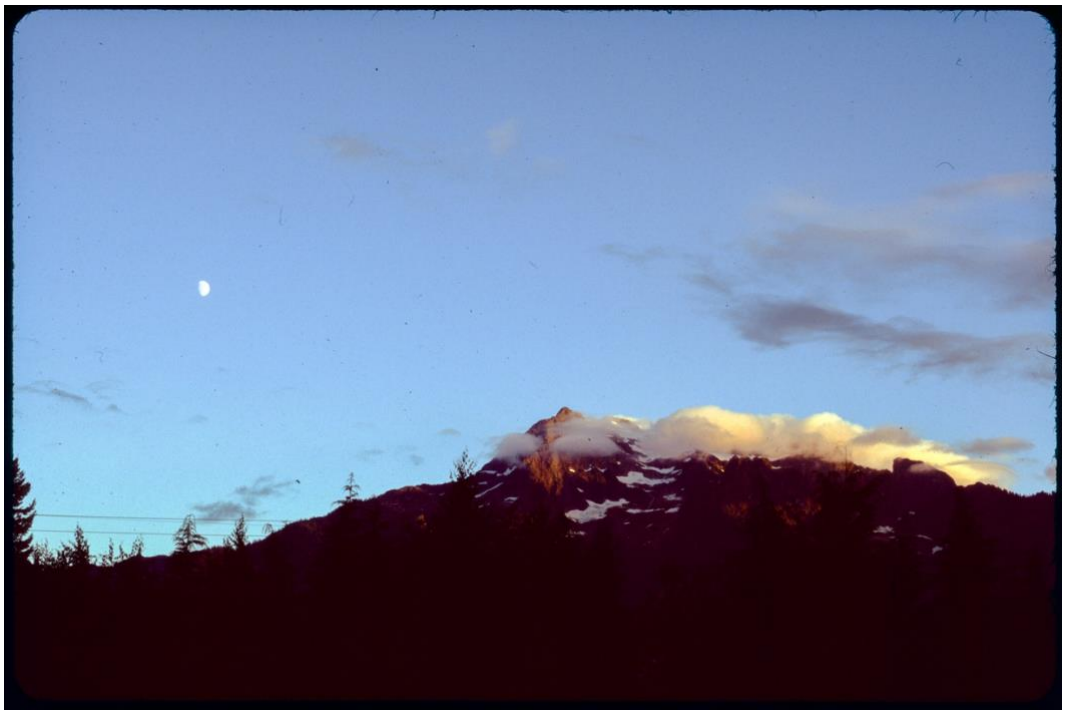

Figure 1. View of Whitehorse Mountain from Darrington Bluegrass Music Park campground (Darrington, Washington), ca. July 2007. Scanned from slide. Photo by author.

Figure 2. Sign at entrance of Darrington Bluegrass Music Park (Darrington, Washington), July 2017. Photo by author.

Figure 3. Rich Jones, photographed at his home (Mount Vernon, Washington), January 2018. Photo by author.

Figure 4. Bertha (Nations) Whiteside and daughter, Brenda Fecht, photographed at Bertha's home (Darrington, Washington), January 2018. Photo by author.

Figure 5. Harley Worthington, photographed at his home (Everett, Washington), January 2018. Photo by author.

Figure 6. Vivian Williams, photographed at her home (Seattle, Washington), January 2018. Photo by author.

Figure 7. Irene Namkung and John Ullman, photographed at their home (Seattle, Washington), January 2018. Photo by author.

Figure 8. Carl Hale, photographed at a local coffeeshop (Parkland, Washington), January 2018. Photo by author.

Figure 9. Barry Brower, photographed at his home (Anacortes, Washington), January 2018. Photo by author.

Figure 10. Harley Bray, photographed at his home (Edmonds, Washington), January 2018. Photo by author.

Figure 11. Bertha (Nations) Whiteside, performing with The Combinations at the 2017 Darrington Bluegrass Festival (Darrington, Washington), July 2017. Photo by author.

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